

Murder Picture

George Harmon Coxe

IT CAN BE NO surprise that George Harmon Coxe (1901-1984) began his career as a newspaperman, since his two major literary creations, Jack “Flashgun” Casey (mostly known as “Flash” Casey) and Kent Murdock were both photo-journalists.

Casey came first, created for *Black Mask* in 1934. A secondary character here to young reporter Tom Wade, he quickly moves to the fore, accompanied by his young sidekick on a regular basis. There were more than twenty “Flash” Casey stories and five novels.

Murdock, very much like Casey but not as tough or violent, made his debut the following year in the novel *Murder with Pictures* (1935). Although Casey is the better-known character, Murdock appeared in many more novels (twenty-one in all), the first of which was filmed in 1936 with Lew Ayres playing the hero.

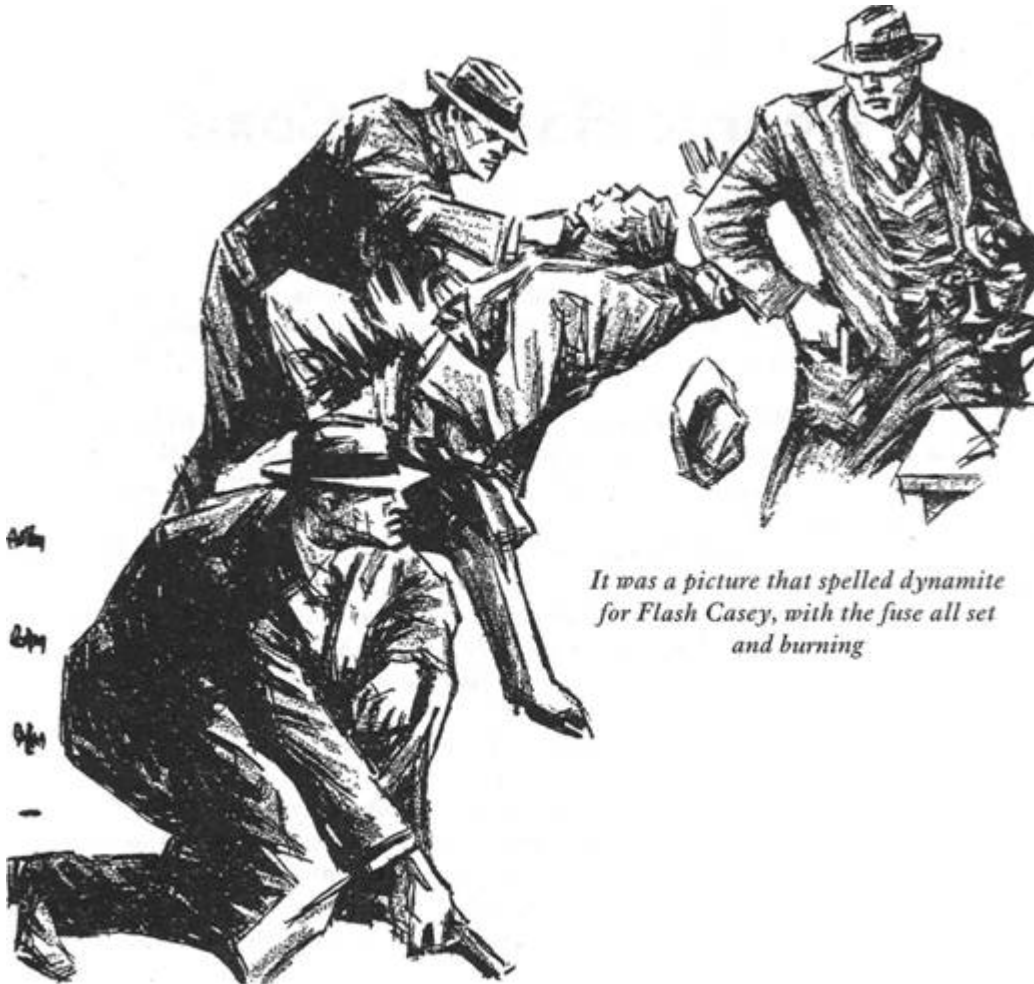
One unusual aspect of both series is that most of the adventures feature private detectives but, unlike virtually all other fiction in *Black Mask* and the other pulps, they are bad guys, frequently hired by villains to protect their evil interests.

While the earliest stories are much in the Carroll John Daly school of “shoot first, ask questions later,” they soon became more cerebral, especially the Murdock tales, as murders and their solutions tended to involve technological devices rather than merely a bullet in the skull.

“Murder Picture” was first published in *Black Mask* in the issue of January 1935.

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*It was a picture that spelled dynamite
for Flash Casey, with the fuse all set
and burning*

1



Flash Casey, ace photographer of the *Globe*, Flash Casey, as everyone from the copy boy to Captain Judson of the Homicide Squad called him, stood scowling down at a photographic enlargement spread on the table before him.

Big shoulders hunched above his lean waist, reddish hair ruffled, eyes narrowed and

frowning, he cursed in a steady monotone of disgust.

The little man at the corner desk, busy making records of his prints, stopped work long enough to glance over at the big cameraman and grin.

"Whatsa bellyache, Flash?"

"Plenty," Casey growled. He rapped a big, bony fist on the barely dried photo. "Here I get an inside tip on that racetrack layout raid and me and Wade crash in just as they are

pulling it. I shoot one—this one.” The fist rapped again. “Then Haley and his pals throw us out. I knew there must be something more we missed, so I duck in a back way and shoot another through the washroom door, and this time the cops steal the plate off me before they put me out again.”

“Well, ain’t that one you got any good?”

“A pip, but that other one musta—”

“Hell,” the little man said, fretfully, “Blaine don’t *have* to know there was another one, does he?”

A slow grin drove the scowl from Casey’s homely, strong features.

“You’re saying something, Tim. He don’t *have* to—unless he asks me. Guess I better get it in to him.”

He gathered up the print and started towards the door.

“And tell him how good it is,” the little man jeered. “Aw, you guys make me—”

The jangling telephone bell cut him off.

Casey, passing it, took up the receiver.

“Yeah—Casey.”

The voice of Lieutenant Logan of the Homicide Squad answered him.

“Listen, Flash. I just talked with Haley. He tells me you sneaked into the washroom of that race-track dive.”

“What about it?”

“Did you come across the airshaft—from the Blue Grass Products office?”

“Yeah, but—”

“I’m down there now. I want to see you.”

“When? I’m busy and—”

“I don’t care a damn whether you’re busy or not. Get out here right away or I’ll send somebody after you.”

Casey said: “Aw—” and pronged the receiver.

His eyes were thoughtful as he walked into the city room, but lighted up as he approached the city editor.

Casey said: “Boy, this is a honey,” and laid the eight by ten photographic enlargement on Blaine’s desk.

The city editor pushed up in his chair, slid his forearms across the desk top and glanced at the print. It was an exceptionally clear reproduction of the interior of a race-track layout, taken a few seconds after the police had staged a raid an hour previous.

The camera had caught the major part of the room, with its blackboards, loud speaker, cashier’s cage; most of the milling crowd of forty or fifty people, half of them women. Casey, a look of satisfaction on his thick face, leaned down and pointed to specific features of the picture, as though he was afraid Blaine would miss them.

“There’s Captain Judson,” he said, “and Haley, the louse.” He moved his forefinger to a stocky man with a white, fatty face who was just coming out of a door on which the word, *Men*, was barely legible. “And get a load of Mike Handy.”

Casey’s forefinger moved to a smartly dressed and obviously frightened lady who had

thrown one arm around the neck of a plump young man with a tiny mustache: Lee Fessendon, son of the new owner of the *Globe*, brother of the managing editor. A fellow who, though married, continued to retain his reputation of man-about-town.

"Young Fessendon." Casey's voice was humorously disgusted. "Takin' an afternoon off." He straightened up, grunted. "Made a hell of a fuss about it, wanted the plate."

Blaine leaned back in his chair and his clasped hands made a cradle for the nape of his neck.

"This all you took?" he said finally.

"It ain't all I took." Casey's mouth dipped at the corners and his brows knotted in a scowl as he thought of the second picture he had taken, of the trouble he had surmounted to get it.

"But it's all I got," he growled. "Haley and a couple of his dicks took the other one away from me."

His brows flattened out. "But what's the matter with that one? It's exclusive—and it's good, ain't it?"

"Very good," said Blaine sardonically. "Very good indeed; only we can't use it."

"Can't use it?" Casey exploded. "Who says we can't?"

Blaine would have been poor copy for the movies. He did not look the part. He was too well dressed, and he had no eyeshade. Slender, distinguished looking with his prematurely gray hair, he had a lean, hawklike face and small gray eyes that met Casey's in a cold, contemptuous stare.

"I do," he said, and his voice was thin, abrupt.

"Oh." Casey's eyes narrowed. "So that's how it is?" He thrust his hands deep in his trousers pockets, brought his chin down on his chest and surveyed Blaine from under bushy brows. "If anybody'd told me this an hour ago, I'd called him a liar."

"Told you what?" said Blaine irritably.

Casey made no direct answer. Leaning stiff armed on the desk, he made a bulky figure with a thick, upward-arching chest, and tousled hair that was peppered with gray at the temples and too long at the back. A squarish face, set, thin-lipped now, held dark eyes that were narrowed and smoldering.

"The only thing I ever liked about you," he said flatly, "was that you played ball. You protected confidential channels, but you never squashed a story or picture because it was about a friend of somebody's Aunt Emma. But Fessendon's got your number, huh? When he cracks the whip—"

"You interest me," sneered Blaine.

Casey pointed at the picture on the desk. "Lee Fessendon got caught out of school with one of his women. He's scared to take a bawling out from his wife, huh?"

He made noises in his throat and shook his head. "He tried to talk me out of the plate down there in the hall. But you—you have to humor the boss' brother, huh?"

"Finished?" purred Blaine. And when Casey remained silent, "Satisfied now, are you?"

He leaned forward in his chair, smiled a smile that held no mirth, spoke in a voice that was brittle.

"I don't have to make explanations to a camera. But sometimes I like to humor you, Flash. And I'm going to tell you the answer to this one; because you amuse me, and because it helps illustrate my original and permanent contention— that you are a thick-headed sap."

Blaine reached for one of the telephones on the desk, spoke a few words. When he looked back at Casey, he said:

"You sneaked this picture over on Captain Judson. And the reason we are killing it, sweetheart, is because Judson called Fessendon and told him if we printed it he'd close us out at Headquarters for a month."

"Judson called—" Casey broke off and a slow flush crept into his lean cheeks. His widened eyes looked chagrined, incredulous.

In another moment, J. H. Fessendon, brother of Lee, son of the new owner, and managing editor of the *Globe*, swung through the doorway of a corridor behind the desk. He accepted the photograph from Blaine with a manicured hand, studied it.

Casey's flushed face knotted in a scowl as he watched Fessendon. He did not like him or his pseudo go-getter methods. A plump, baldish man of forty-five: pink skin that looked as if a massage was part of his daily ritual; expensive tweeds, tailored with a tight vest and waistband, as though to control and mold the paunch.

"Yes—yes." Fessendon said crisply. "This must be the one. Too bad we can't use it. Where's the plate?" He glanced at Blaine, who eyed him narrowly, then at Casey. "Get the plate, Casey."

Casey fastened contemptuous eyes on Blaine, wheeled and left the desk. In the photographic department, he asked Tom Wade

if he had made an extra print. Wade said he had, and Casey growled:

"Swell. I'll paste it in my diary." At the doorway, he turned. "Put it in my desk."

Fessendon was pacing back and forth beside Blaine's desk, followed by surreptitious glances from the crew in the "slot," the half dozen rewrite men scattered about the city room. Casey handed Fessendon the plate, and he held it up to the light. Grunting in approval, he struck the glass against the corner of the desk. The plate shattered in a dozen pieces. Then Fessendon tore up the print.

"Got to make sure," he said easily, picking up the pieces and dropping them in a wastebasket, "got to make sure, you know."

Blaine turned in his chair and watched Fessendon through the doorway, as did every other eye in the room. When he turned back, he met Casey's humid, searching gaze for a moment, and his face flushed. Then he busied himself with some copy, said:

"Don't stand there gawking. If you got legitimate shots we'd have something to print."

Casey opened his mouth and rage kept it open. But he did not speak. He could not think of the right thing to say.

2

Tom Wade was talking on the telephone when Casey returned to the anteroom of the photographic department and slid into the chair behind his desk. He lit a cigarette, puffed once, then let it hang from his half opened lips.

The hot anger which streaked through his brain when Fessendon smashed the plate was a smoldering, cancerous growth now. A

heaviness that was a mixture of dejection and disappointment weighed upon him. It was not so much the loss of the plate; that had happened before; it was the way Blaine had let him down—and Fessendon's gesture, as though he could trust neither Casey nor the city editor.

Wade talked for nearly five minutes longer, and when he hung up Casey told him what had happened.

"It's like I told you before," he finished. "The sheet's goin' to seed since Fessendon bought it. And I still think Lee is the guy that gyped us out of the shot. He probably called Blaine and Blaine gave me the song about Judson—"

"That don't sound like Blaine to me," Wade said slowly.

"And Fessendon," Casey rasped. "Bustin' the plate like we was crooks or something." He began to curse, and after a moment said: "Who the hell were you talkin' with so long?"

"Alma Henderson."

"That tramp that was—"

"Wait a minute!" Wade's voice was unnaturally harsh. A blond, round-faced youth with a guileless manner and a happy-go-lucky philosophy, Wade's ordinarily good-natured face was now flushed, his blue eyes snapping.

"Oh," said Casey and his brows came up. "So that's the way it is."

"No," Wade said doggedly, flushing at his burst of temper, "but she's no tramp. She's a good kid and—"

Casey's mind flashed back to the raid. To get the second picture, the one Haley had taken, he and Wade had crashed into the office of the Blue Grass Products, which was

separated from the race-track room by an airshaft. Casey had been in the building before, knew there was an air-shaft and had crossed this to get to the men's room of the gambling hall.

Alma Henderson was apparently in charge of the Blue Grass office. It had surprised Casey that Wade knew her, because heretofore the youth had but little time for women. But Casey, intent on getting another picture, dismissed his curiosity and had left Wade arguing with the girl while he crossed the airshaft with his camera.

He said: "She's a good kid, huh? Okey. But she works for the Blue Grass outfit, and Moe Nyberg runs it. A cheap tout, a first-class thug. Why, the heel; everything he touches stinks. He's probably hooked up with that race-track dive, now that I think of it. And he plays with Mike Handy who runs the biggest gyp stable in the East. So what does that make this Henderson dame?"

"What the hell?" Wade flung out. "A girl's got to eat."

"All right, all right. I don't care. I got troubles of my own."

Casey lit another cigarette, puffed at it until his head was shrouded in blue. But it wasn't all right. Wade was impulsive, and he had a lot to learn. To get mixed up with any woman connected with Nyberg might put him on the skids.

He said: "What did she want?"

"She wants me to come over to her place."

"What for? She knows you're workin', don't she?"

"She's got a story." Wade said jerkily. "She wouldn't tell me over the phone, but she says it's a job for the cops."

"Hah!" rasped Casey. "Then why don't she go down to Headquarters and spill it?"

"Here's why." Wade took a newspaper from his desk, opened it, pointed to a single column head on page 12.

Casey read:

GIRL PRISONER FLEES DOCTOR

Brought to the State Hospital in East Concord Street for a physical examination, Miss Mary Merkle, 21, serving a sentence at the Reformatory for Women until 1937, escaped today from the office of Doctor . . .

Casey looked up. "I told you she was a tramp."

Wade flushed. "You're wrong, Flash. She gave me part of the story over the phone. She came down from Vermont three years ago. She got mixed up in a bad crowd, there was a raid, she had no near relatives—"

Wade went on with his story and Casey looked at the date line of the paper. May 17th.

"When she escaped," Wade went on, "she had no place to go, so she looked up one of the guys she used to know and he got her a job with Moe Nyberg. If she goes to the cops with her story, bingo. Back to the Reformatory."

"That's probably where she belongs," growled Casey, and was half ashamed of his words when he saw the hurt look in Wade's eyes.

"She's scared, Flash. And"—Wade hesitated, caught his lower lip between his teeth—"I think she wants me to help her out of town."

"You're nuts," Casey said. He looked at the youth, read correctly the stubborn set of the jaw. He spread his hand wearily, said:

"Listen. I gotta go back to Roxbury and see Logan. Something's up. You can go with me. And after that I'll go and see this Henderson dame with you."

Wade shook his head. "She told me to hurry."

"But—" snorted Casey.

"Wait." Wade backed towards the door and his voice was a bit thick. "She's depending on me, says I'm the only one in town she can trust. I told her I'd come and I'm not letting her down—not even for you."

Casey blew out his breath. Guileless as hell. And just as stubborn. Sold on the girl—or her story. He said:

"What's her address?"

"Seven sixty-three Pratt Street."

Casey smiled then and the smile was genuine, tinged with a certain admiration for the youth's earnest loyalty. He said: "Okey, give it a whirl. Only watch your step and remember she works for Moe Nyberg."

When Wade went out, Casey shrugged and picked up his camera and platecase. "I'd better take 'em," he said half aloud. "Logan sounded tough."

Fifteen minutes later, Casey set his camera and case on the floor in front of a door whose upper panel of frosted glass bore the inscription: *Blue Grass Products*, and scowled.

The transverse corridor on the third floor of the ancient and deserted looking office building was empty, ominously quiet, lighted by a single bulb at the far end. A half dozen doors, with upper panels of glass, gave on the hall, and in each case they were dark. The one in front of him was dark, and this he could not understand.

Where the hell was Logan?

Casey sucked at his upper lip, pushed his hat forward and scratched his shaggy nape. He swept the tails of his topcoat aside as he jammed his fists on his hips; then he yanked the hat brim down, said: "Nerts," and banged his fist on the doorframe.

He waited a moment, banged again. Then, although he heard no sound, he happened to glance at the doorknob. It was turning slowly.

Doubt, chilled and gripping, reared up in his brain. He reached quickly for the platecase, but as he straightened up, prepared to retreat, the door came open a three-inch crack.

Casey froze there, an open-mouthed, wide-eyed statue. Surprise, momentary panic, riveted his gaze on that vertical strip of blackness, on the muzzle of a gun which had been thrust forward in the opening so that the dim light of the hall caught the round barrel, burnished it.

For a second or two there was no sound but the sharp suck of Casey's breath as it caught in his lungs. Then the door swung open and a low, matter-of-fact voice said:

"Okey, Flash. Come on in."

Casey exhaled noisily and stepped forward with sweat breaking out on his forehead. The lights of the room went on. Logan moved out of the doorway and Casey cursed, said: "Why you louse!"

He stopped in front of Logan, glared at him, and the lights of the room glistened on the thin film of moisture on his forehead.

"You louse! You scared hell out of me."

"Couldn't be helped," said Logan flatly, making no apology.

"Ah—" Casey brushed his forehead, pushed back his hat. "You knew I was comin'. You called me up, didn't you? What the hell do—"

"I knew you were coming," said Logan holstering his gun, "but I'm hopin' we might get some other callers."

Something in Logan's cold abrupt tone caught and held Casey's interest. It was no gag, that gun business. Logan was in dead earnest. And when he got that way—

Casey glanced around. From where he stood, the office was as he remembered it; long, well furnished with a flat-topped desk, a typewriter desk, leather upholstered chairs. The doorway on the right, apparently leading to a connecting office, had been closed this afternoon. It was open now and two detectives stood in the doorway.

Casey recognized the short, stocky fellow with the red face and the heavy chain draped across his bulging vest as Sergeant Manahan. The other fellow was from Headquarters, too, but he did not know his name. He said:

"Well, what's the act for?"

Logan took him by the arm, walked him out of the entryway so that he could get a full view of the room. Then Casey saw the man on the floor.

Between the little entryway and the cubbyhole, with its washstand and window giving on the airshaft, was a closet. The door of this was open, and the body of a man, lying on his stomach, his face cocked to one side, was half in, half out of the closet, as though he had fallen out when the door was opened.

He was well dressed, his oxford gray topcoat looked new and his shoes were polished. From what Casey could see, the fellow appeared to be about thirty-five, dark-haired, average height. Now there was a definite stiffness about the still form, and in the back a reddish blotch fused with the gray fabric of the coat.

Casey looked at Logan. "Who is he?"

"Grady. A private dick from New York."

"Shot in the back?"

"Twice—from close range."

"Where do I come in?" asked Casey, frowning.

"That's what I want to know," said Logan. "I want to know all about the horseplay you staged here this afternoon. I may be wrong. But I think this guy was in that closet—dead—when you were in this room."

Casey's eyes widened. He stared at Logan, said: "-----!" Then he thought about the Henderson woman, and Wade, and some of the color oozed from his face.

"Then she saw it!" he wheezed huskily. "She must've seen it. And it was a plant. That's why she wanted Wade."

"Keep your pants on," Logan said brusquely, "and start at the beginning."

3

Lieutenant Logan, sitting on the massive, flat-topped desk at the end of the room, his arms angling out beside him, propping him up, was a well built fellow with black hair and eyes. About Casey's age, he had a flair for clothes. His linen was immaculate, so was his police record. Right now he wore spats—and nobody said anything about them either.

"Wait a minute," he said when Casey told him about the girl—and the telephone call which had summoned Wade. "At the beginning. How'd you get here, what'd you do—everything. I want it all."

Casey glared at Logan for a moment, then spoke in thick jerky tones.

"I got the tip from Gerry at Headquarters. When Wade and I got downstairs Judson and Haley and their gang were just gettin' ready to start. We went up the stairs and when they broke down the door I went in behind the cops. I got one picture, then Judson threw me out."

Casey cursed at the thought, continued rapidly.

"I knew there was an airshaft some place around so Wade and I cut down this other hall. I figured it oughtta be about there, so we crashed in here; didn't know what it was but took a chance.

"The Henderson dame was alone here. She gave us an argument, looked scared as hell, but Wade talked to her and—"

"The closet was closed," Logan said.

"Yeah," chafed Casey, "so was this other door—to the next office. And anyway I opened the window"—he pointed to the frosted glass pane in the wall of the cubbyhole—"and saw that the window across the shaft was partway-open."

He stepped towards a wide shelf which lay on iron brackets on one wall of the cubbyhole. "The dame was arguing all the time, but I found out this shelf was loose, I shoved it across the shaft and it just reached. So I took the camera and slid across. It was the men's room."

"Anybody in it?" asked Logan.

"No. And I went through to the hall, got one picture. But Haley saw me, caught me before I could reach the door. He and a couple of those thugs you call detectives took the plate away from me."

"Did you come back here?"

"Yeah, but"—Casey's thick face cracked in a scowl—"the place was closed."

"Hah!" snapped Logan. "Then what?"

"I couldn't figure it," Casey went on, still scowling, "but I finally found Wade downstairs. He said that the girl was afraid Nyberg might get sore, and it was time to close up anyway, so she chased him out of the office and locked up."

Casey shook his head. Logan waited silently.

"It sounded screwy at the time, but I had other things on my mind. Anyway she wanted Wade to take her downstairs—said she was afraid the cops might think she had been in the gambling place. So Wade took her downstairs. He was out on the street when I found him—the

crazy fool. He said a car with a couple tough-looking eggs came along and the dame got in and left him standing there."

"That's all, huh?" Logan asked.

"That's all that happened to me, yeah."

"All right." Logan pushed back his gray felt, pursed his lips, finally said: "It begins to add up. Now I'll tell you my side."

"You're about the only button pusher I know that's satisfied to take pictures and leave the police work for the cops. And that's important this time—because there's no pictures—no story—tonight. We're gambling that the killers might come back for the body *if they think the kill is covered.*"

Logan watched Casey drop into a chair, then continued.

"Grady was working for three or four racetracks—the stewards or something. Remember that stink about the horse doping ring a couple years or so ago?" Casey nodded and Logan said: "The Feds were in on that. This is something new."

"Grady was about ready to crack this ring until Dopey Donlan got knocked off a couple days ago."

"He was in it?" Casey asked.

"Yeah. And that's why he was killed. Because the big shots were afraid he'd squawk under pressure. He's a hophead and he probably would."

"But Grady had some dope on that kill. I didn't know a thing about it till last night. Grady worked under cover until he came down to Headquarters and told me what he had. He said he thought he'd be ready for the showdown today. But you know these private dicks. Afraid

we'd steal his stuff. Wouldn't spill a thing till he was ready."

Logan shrugged. "Well, he was ready this afternoon. He was the guy that tipped us off to this joint. He had the man he wanted. When he pulled the raid, Judson was to pinch the killer—or the big hot, or somebody."

Logan slid off the desk and walked over to the body.

"What an idea. He's cleaned. Nothing on him but his clothes. If he hadn't come to see me last night, we'd have a hell of a time identifying him at all."

"How'd you get wise he was here," said Casey, taking out a cigarette and trying to get his mind off Wade.

"Haley found some blood in that washroom across the way. He found some—just a spot or two—on the window sill. He remembered you being there, looked around, tumbled to this office. But it was locked. I came down. We found him in the closet."

Casey stood up, began to pace the floor. "Then somebody got him into the washroom from the race-track dive, or followed him in, put the slug on him and"—he stopped, turned to glance at the wide shelf he had used—"and slid his body across here."

"Yeah," said Logan. "And you and Wade busted in. The killers might've been in this next office. The girl had to get Wade out. That's why she got him to go downstairs with her." Logan's voice got thin, thready.

"That's why we're waiting. If they aren't wise they'll come back for the body—I hope. That must've been their original plan—to leave it here till tonight. No word got out of this. Judson, Haley, the examiner and us are the only ones that know about it.

"We've got a guy that tried to get in that washroom about three or four minutes before the raid. He says the door was locked, that he watched it from then on till the raid. Nobody came out. So that must've been the time that Grady got it. Somebody got wise to him—but they couldn't know about the raid. It just happened to break right after they'd killed him and—"

Logan broke off in surprise as Casey spun towards him with a thick, throaty curse.

"The picture!" Casey's eyes got bright and glaring. "The one I took first. That's it. I caught Handy with the camera, *caught him coming out of the washroom a couple seconds after the raid*. He must've been in there when the door was locked, and—"

"Wait a minute!" rapped Logan, and grabbed Casey. "What picture—what the hell you talking about?"

Casey told him then. Described the picture he had taken in short, clipped sentences. But he could not keep still when he talked. He had to walk, keep moving, because of the thought that festered in his brain and gave him no peace.

"It's gotta be that way. And the girl knew Grady was dead—in that closet. She musta told Nyberg and—"

"We got word out to pick Moe up," Logan interrupted. "We had Handy—and let him go."

"They must've made that Henderson tramp get Wade out to her place," Casey rushed on, "so they could put the pressure on him. Maybe force him to get that place. Only—"

Casey broke off and went slack-jawed.

"Only what?" rapped Logan.

"Only there ain't any plate. Blaine—Fessendon, the -----!" Casey explained what had happened. "Those hoods won't believe the kid when he tells 'em it's smashed."

Logan jerked Casey around. "Take it easy. You got too much imagination. That girl might be on the level. And Wade. Hell, with his kind of dumb luck—"

He broke off as Casey jerked loose and started for the door. He leaped after the big photographer, caught him again.

"Where you goin'?"

"I'm goin' to that girl's place and—"

"No you're not." Logan's chin jutted out and his brows drew down. "You're goin' down to the *Globe* with me and get that picture first. After that we'll go."

Casey put balled fists on his hips and leaned forward so that his chin was three inches from Logan's nose.

"I am, huh?" he grunted.

"It's a murder picture," said Logan. "With that and this other guy's testimony about the washroom, and the M.E.'s verdict to the time of death—"

"And Judson callin' in, sayin' we can't print it," flared Casey.

"I don't know about Judson, but—" Logan began.

"And Blaine," grated Casey. "If he'd had his way there wouldn't be any picture. But there is; I held out on him. And you oughtta be----- damn' glad I did. You can have it. But I'm not gonna waste time goin' to the office now; and

you're not gonna take me down till I find that girl."

Anger flooded Logan's face and he started to speak. For just a moment he met Casey's burning stare; then he backed a step and threw up his hands.

Those black eyes of Logan's could see beneath many surfaces; and when Casey spoke like that you believed him. Logan believed him now. And strangely enough, his lips twitched in a flicker of a smile.

"If that's the way it is," he said caustically, "I guess I'd better go with you." Turning to Manahan he added: "Call Judson. Get a couple more men up here. You may get action yet. But if word of this gets out I'm gonna beat the hell out of you, personally."

He grabbed Casey, who had already shouldered his platecase, said: "The kid'll be okey as long as the kill is covered. But that girl. We can use her."

Pratt Street is a narrow offshoot of Massachusetts Avenue. The sidewalks are narrow and made to look more so because the apartments, seedy looking three and four-story brick structures, jammed close together, are all set right out to the edge of the legal building line.

Seven sixty-three, in the middle of the block, had but two characteristics to distinguish it from its adjoining neighbors and those across the street: its number, and the name *Edgemere*, painted in gilt across its single door.

The tunnel-like entryway was so dark Logan had to strike a match to inspect the name cards above the mailboxes along the right wall. "This is the place, all right," he said. "Alma Henderson— 3-C."

The inner door was unlocked and the air here seemed hot and stuffy after the chilled sweep of the night outside. They climbed silently, Logan in the lead, and the soft pounding of a steam radiator on the second floor paced their steps up the last flight of stairs.

Three-C was on the right, rear. Logan knocked once, turned the knob. The door was not locked and as he opened it, Casey grunted impatiently and pushed him into the lighted room. Logan took two steps and stopped short and stiff, so that Casey ran into him and heard him breathe a curse.

Casey looked over his shoulder and saw why. Alma Henderson was on the floor by a wide-open window. A crumpled heap of arms and legs and orange dress.

Casey closed the door softly, and automatically. Logan started across the room. Casey remained where he was, glanced about and became vaguely aware of a cheaply furnished living-room that tried hard to be smart.

Then, because a new indefinable sense of fear reached at his nerve ends with icy fingers, he called: "Wade!" and was instantly aware of the hollowness of his voice, and the absurdity of the act. Wade was not here. Because if he were here—

"Shot her in the back, too," Logan said bitterly.

Casey lurched across the room. He looked down at the lifeless figure of a girl who was tall, and young, and slender—too slender, and had nice hands. Even in death her face held a youthful prettiness that makeup could not hide.

His gaze held by the discolored spot in the left side of that orange dress, Casey

continued to stare at Alma Henderson. But after a moment he was not conscious of what he saw. It was a mental picture that sickened him and he put his thoughts into words.

"She saw Grady killed. She had to go, but before that they got her to spot Wade."

"That puts the weight on your picture," Logan said slowly. "It's not as good as the girl, but she can't testify."

"Suppose Wade saw her get it?" Casey spoke as though talking to himself. "You know how that sets him up."

"If he's not here, he's still alive."

"You look around then," Casey muttered. "I'll stay here."

"Sure," said Logan, moving away. "It's gonna be a pleasure to meet up with these guys. In the back. And it looks like she might've been trying to open that window." He cursed softly. "It's kinda screwy. It don't look like a planned kill."

Casey backed away a step, lifted his head and looked out the window. City lights from beyond suffused the drab sky and made a dirty blue background for the rear rooflines of houses in the next block, for spindly antennae, and a potbellied water-tower. A sound of movement behind him flicked his eyes away from the somber picture and he turned.

A man stood beside the doorway to the inner hall. A stocky man with a twisted grin on his broad, sallow face. He had a small automatic in his right hand.

Then Logan came into the room. He had his hands raised shoulder high, and he walked slowly. Behind him came a thin, hollow-chested, ratty-looking youth who held the muzzle of his gun stiffly against Logan's back.

"Just be nice," the stocky man said.
"Both of you."

4

The tableau held motionless a second or two; then the thin man's glance slid sidewise to Casey and he jabbed with his gun, spoke to Logan.

"So it's gonna be a pleasure to meet up with us, huh?" He chuckled but his lips were sneering. "Well, the pleasure's all yours. How do you like it?"

Casey felt a thickness in his throat and he cleared it with a grunt, said: "Where's Wade?" ominously.

"Who's Wade?" asked the stocky man and cocked one eyebrow in an expression of mock concern.

"You know who," said Casey huskily and slid one foot forward across the rug.

"Hold it!" clipped the stocky man. "We know how we stand, and if you think you can crowd us, you're nuts."

Casey stopped with his left foot advanced. He was a good eight feet from Logan, ten feet or more from the stocky man. He'd never get that far, and he knew it. He had no weapon, and there was nothing he could get his hands on—except the vase on the gateleg table, and that was back by the wall.

The stocky man pocketed his gun, moved towards the telephone stand near the doorway to the inner hall, said: "Get him away from that phone. I'd better find out what we do with these punks."

The thin man marched Logan forward three steps, and as they stopped Casey watched the lieutenant. The handsome face was set now, and there was a tight, pinched smile on his lips. The smooth skin at his cheekbones was stretched like a banjo head, but it was the eyes that held Casey's gaze.

There was an intense gleam in their dark depths, and, as Casey watched, he saw one lid pull down in a slow, deliberate wink. The lid remained narrowed.

Casey knew then that Logan was going to fight for it. He weighed their chances and then forgot about that angle. He would be ready when Logan moved. He waited.

The stocky man had dialed a number and was talking in low, jerky tones.

"One of 'em's that picture-taker; the other acts like a cop...Yeah...Yeah. Because we couldn't get out. We didn't lock the door, and these muggs bust in with only one knock. We couldn't make the back door, so we ducked in the bedroom. Sure. But what do we do with 'em?"

He was silent for a moment after that: then he said: "Okey. Yeah."

Casey did not see the fellow hang up, because his eyes were still on Logan. But he heard the click of the receiver. And at that instant, Logan acted.

His movement was a peculiar, spinning maneuver that should have been awkward, but wasn't. The spin was catlike in its quickness, compact, and to the right.

As he moved his right fist swung down from the shoulder height, smashed on the thin man's gun wrist. The automatic spun from the fellow's grasp, skidded towards Casey. Then

Logan completed the spin as his left came up and around in a looping hook.

Casey went into action as he heard the smack of fist on jawbone. One step brought him over the fallen automatic. As he stooped, a slanting, corner-of-the-eye picture presented the stocky-man straightening from the telephone table, clawing at his pocket.

The automatic was cool in Casey's hot fingers. As he snatched it up he went to one knee and swung his arm over. He saw the sweep of the stocky man's gun, caught sight of the muzzle. Then the roar in his ears, the slap of recoil in his wrist told him the shot was his own.

The gun barrel that threatened him wavered, dipped. The automatic began to slide from limp fingers. Then Casey raised his eyes. The man's mouth was open, quivering. There was a bluish hole over the one eye. He put one hand on the telephone table. The hand slipped off and he went over, crashing down with the table and the instrument under him.

Logan blew out his breath and let go of the unconscious gunman he had been holding for a shield. The fellow thudded down on his haunches, toppled over on his side. Logan pulled the telephone out from under the stocky man's body and slipped the receiver into place before he spoke.

"I coulda smacked this egg before," he said grimly. "Only I thought maybe we could learn something from the phone call."

Casey had straightened up. Logan stepped over, took the gun away from him. He turned it over in his hands thoughtfully, and looked at Casey's with eyes that were speculative.

"You're handy with that thing. How'd you learn to put 'em where you want 'em?"

"In France," said Casey absently. "I was a sergeant, and a .45 was the only gun I had. I did some practicing."

He went across to the davenport and sat down, his mind relieved of the necessity of action, returning once more to Wade. Then the thin man stirred on the floor. Casey watched him until he sat up. He stepped towards the fellow, jerked him to his feet and jammed him back against the wall.

"What'd you do with Wade?"

The thin man's eyes showed fear, but his lips tightened. Casey grunted, hauled off and threw a looping right that landed flat-handed against the side of the man's head and knocked him down.

Casey pulled the fellow up again. He repeated the question and when he got no answer, repeated the dose. The fellow began to curse in a whining, yet vicious voice. Logan said: "Lay off."

Casey knocked the man down again. The side of the face was beet-red now, but he was otherwise unmarked. "Where's Wade?" He shook the fellow. "What'd you do with him?"

This time the answer blurted in his face.

"They took him out. Buck'n me stuck around to search the place, to see if there was anything around that might—"

"Who took him out?"

The man seemed to flinch, but his teeth bared and clenched.

"Where'd they take him? Where is he now?"

"Go to hell! I won't—"

Casey lost his temper then. The right came over again, but this time the hand was a fist and it landed on the side of the jaw. The fellow stiffened and he was still stiff when he hit the floor. Casey started after him again, then Logan yanked him back, spun him around.

"I told you to lay off."

"We gotta find Wade," rasped Casey.

"Yeah. Sure. But you mark that guy all up and I'll get blamed for it, and we won't get a chance to work him over. It takes more than a wallop to make some guys talk."

"Well?" Casey's eyes got bright and glaring and his voice was thick. "What do we do, sit here and wait for something to happen?"

"You get down to the *Globe* and camp on the picture. I'll be down after it inside of ten minutes—just as soon as I can get somebody to take over here."

He picked up the telephone, barked a number. Casey, scowling, hesitant, watched Logan until the lieutenant said: "Go on get the hell out of here."

Casey's eyes slid to the girl in the orange dress, with the stain on the back. Then he turned quickly and left the room.

It was not until Casey reached the *Globe* that he remembered his camera in the rumble seat of the roadster, remembered that he had it with him all the time, and that he had taken no pictures in Alma Henderson's apartment.

Ordinarily this would have rankled; his pride in his work would have taunted him. To have a chance like that and get no pictures. This time he did not seem to care. And it was not entirely that the affair was to be kept quiet for a while. The answer, he told himself, was that he did not give a damn whether he got exclusive

pictures or not. What the hell good did it do to break your neck for pictures for a lug like Fessendon? And Blaine. In a mind that was already harassed with thoughts of Wade, there was room for further doubt and uncertainty. It wasn't like Blaine to let even the managing editor pull a stunt like breaking that plate.

To Casey, Blaine had always been the sort of fellow who would quit a job, rather than compromise with his duty or his scruples. And quitting would entail no hardship. He was the best desk man in the city—could get a job in any office.

Casey took the photograph from his desk, studied it. Then, cursing softly, he went down to the photo-engraving room, spoke to a sturdy looking man in blue jumpers and shirt sleeves.

"This is the only print Mac. I've gotta turn it over to the police, so make me a cut of it, will you, just in case this gets lost?"

Mac said sure, and Casey waited while the fellow set up the print and made his negative. As he returned the picture he said:

"What size you want it?"

"Same size, I guess."

"What'll I do with the cut?"

"Oh—" Casey hesitated, not caring particularly what was done with it. All he wanted was to have something to fall back on, some margin of safety in case something happened to the print. Blaine or no Blaine, he was going to hang on to it, until Handy and Nyberg were rounded up, until he found Wade. "Just pull a proof and keep it on hand for me," he finished.

5

Casey was slouched down behind his desk when Logan came in five minutes later. The lieutenant took the print, scanned it eagerly.

"It's gonna help," he said. "And it's about all we got, because I couldn't find anyone in that gambling take that remembered seeing anyone come out of that washroom."

"What're you gonna do?" Casey asked morosely.

"I've got that skinny guy outside. I'm takin' him down to work over."

"Well damn you, Logan, put on the pressure! He knows where Wade is—make him talk and hurry it up!"

"I'll crack him," Logan said resentfully. "Hang on till you hear from me."

When the lieutenant left an office boy stuck his head in the doorway. "Hey, Flash. There's a guy here wants to see you."

"Tell him I'm busy," grunted Casey.

The boy went out. But he came back a few minutes later, said: "That guy won't go," apologetically. "He says Wade told him to come and see you, that Wade owes him for the trip an—"

"Jeeze!" Casey's eyes widened in sudden hope and amazement. "Get him up here!"

The taxi-driver, a beetle-browed husky, came in a moment later and immediately took the offensive.

"Somebody owes me some dough," he barked. "I want it."

"Maybe you'll get it," said Casey. "Where's Wade?"

"I drove him to Pratt Street. He told me to wait, but he acted kinda nervous about something. He started in the house, then came back and said that if he didn't come out in half an hour I was to come to you and tell you, that you'd pay."

"Nervous, huh?" wheezed Casey. "Boy, am I glad I threw a little scare into him before he left."

The driver blinked, said: "What?" and Casey snapped:

"Never mind—never mind."

"Well," the driver shrugged, "anyway, he came out about twenty minutes later—with a couple guys I'd seen go in before. But he didn't come near my cab. They got in another bus. Well, it shaped up kinda screwy to me so I followed that other car. Then I came back here. I been waiting for—"

Casey blew out his breath and a tight smile pressed his lips against his teeth. "Where'd they go?"

The driver gave an address on Alson Street, and Casey said:

"Did you see 'em go in the place?"

"No. I didn't want to stop. But I saw 'em get out of the car before I turned the next corner. Now how about my dough? It's two-forty, waitin' time and all."

Casey took out a five-dollar bill, and as he passed it to the driver his brain focused on one thought. He knew where Wade had been taken. He might have been moved since; he might not be there now. But it was a red hot lead.

The driver said: "I can't change that."

"Who said anything about change?" snapped Casey. Then, before the driver could do more than grin, the telephone rang. Casey answered it and a harsh baritone said:

"Casey?"

"Yeah."

"You got a picture of that raid this afternoon. The kid buddy of yours says it hadn't been developed when he left the office. Is it still that way?"

Casey was not long in making up his mind. Wade, knowing no one would believe him if he said the plate was smashed—that would be too much like a stall—had sold somebody on the idea that the plate had not been developed.

"Sure." Casey hunched forward, then, seeing the taxi-driver edging towards the door, he motioned him to wait. "What about it?"

"I want it, that's all."

"Who's talking?" Casey, grasping for some idea, tried to stall.

"Don't give me that," rasped the voice. "You got the plate. I want it. And if I get it, the kid'll be okey."

"What's all the fuss about?" Casey made his voice bored, indulgent. "You can have the plate if that's the way it is. We weren't gonna use it anyway. I'll bring it out myself if you say so."

"You'll do as I say if you know what's good for the kid."

"Sure," said Casey.

"Then shut up and listen. You say the plate hasn't been developed. Okey I'll believe you because if you cross me, it's your tough luck, not mine. I'll have somebody pick up that plate. Don't try to tip off the cops, don't worry about havin' this call traced because it's a pay-station. If we get the plate and things are on the level, we'll have it developed. If it's the right one, the kid'll be okey.

"We'll hold him for a few days—to make sure you don't shoot off your mouth about this—and let him go. But try anything screwy—give me the wrong plate—and do you know what'll happen to this guy Wade?"

"I can guess," said Casey bitterly.

"And with your experience you oughtta be pretty close."

Casey glanced up at the taxi-driver and the germ of an idea caught in the recesses of his brain, expanded. He pulled a pad of paper across the desk, began to write hurriedly—a note to Potter, a leg man, telling him to take Casey's roadster and go to the Alson Street address the taxi-driver had given him, and wait outside.

He could take no chances on that angle. That address had to be watched—until he could get in touch with Logan—and Potter could do that much anyway.

"What's to prevent me from callin' the cops and have 'em here waiting for your hoods when they come for the plate?" he said into the phone as he wrote.

"Just this. If my plan is okey—and I don't miss many—my men are outside your door waiting for you right now.

"I'm timin' it close. You've got thirty seconds to go out, get them—without an argument—and let one of them speak to me. I'll

hold the phone for that thirty seconds. Don't hang up, because if you do; if I don't hear from my men; if they don't come back—I know I've got to run for it, and I won't be takin' the kid. Now make up your mind, and step on it. I'm startin' to count."

Casey put the receiver on the desk and jumped to his feet. The sweat was creeping out on his forehead now, because he knew the man on the telephone was speaking the truth. The idea was thought out in detail. It was wild, but that voice made it convincing.

In the interval that he stepped towards the taxi-driver, he thought of many things. He had—Wade had—from now until a fake plate was developed. Blaine—Fessendon, damn them, had ruined forever any possibility of bargaining with the real plate.

Logan had the picture. It might convict Handy. But that would be damn' small satisfaction to Wade. It was too late for Grady, the private dick; for Alma Henderson. But Wade—

Casey grabbed the driver's arm, spoke in a hoarse whisper. "Take this note out to the city room. Find Potter. I don't know where he is, but find him. Give him this note. Then go out and wait for me. I'm gonna need you."

He gave the driver a shove, waited until he disappeared down the corridor; then he walked quickly along the same path, stepped into the noisy, light-flooded city room.

Two men stepped close to him. One was tall, foppishly dressed, handsome in a thin, swarthy way. He had a mustache and he smiled as he spoke, and showed large, even teeth.

"You got a phone call for us?"

Casey glanced at the other man, saw that he was a long-armed, puffy-eared fellow with a bullet head and no neck; then he said:

"Yeah. Step on it, will you?"

"After you," the swarthy man said.

Casey led the way. The men had apparently been warned to try no rough tactics. That alone showed how surely the layout had been planned. If they carried guns, they did not show them.

They hurried down the corridor to the deserted anteroom, and the idea in Casey's head, in full bloom now, put a grim smile on his lips, hope in his heart. Potter could go to Alson Street. Wade had been taken there from the Henderson woman's place; he was not necessarily there now. But if Potter covered that address, if he, Casey, could follow these hoods...

He grunted softly. He had pulled a stunt like that once, gone through a window to an adjoining two-story roof. And that taxi guy should be outside. He'd had some such half-baked idea when he told him to wait. The hoods would take the plate to the boss. If they went to Alson Street, he'd be sure; if not, he'd at least have two chances—and this time he could overlook neither.

The swarthy man said: "Watch him Russo," and bent down to lift the receiver.

"Hello. Yeah—this is Jaeger. Yeah, looks okey to me. Sure, I know what to do."

He hung up, smiled at Casey, and there was something hard, merciless in the smile.

"Let's have the plate."

Casey went to his platecase, took out a plate-holder which held one unexposed plate.

Jaeger took it, slipped it into his pocket. "Okey. I like the way you're behavin'. See if you can keep it up." He turned to Russo. "Get goin'. Out in the hall and see that she's clear."

Russo went out, and Jaeger said, "I'll lock the door from the outside. Don't make too much noise—too soon." He stepped to the telephone and a vicious yank ripped the cord from the box at the baseboard. He did the same with the instrument across the room. Then he took the key from the door and went out.

Casey waited until the key clicked in the lock. Then he yanked open the drawer of his desk. Reaching far back, he drew out his .38 automatic, slipped it into his pocket. Then he crossed the anteroom to a green-shaded window and threw it open.

He'd hoped they'd forget the telephones. Then he could have called Logan, tipped him off. Well, Logan could get in on it later. Right now, and for the first time, he had something he could sink his teeth into, something tangible to work on. He had played his hand the only way he knew how, and the time left him depended on how soon that plate was developed. He did not think any more about Wade, because nothing but action could save him now, and Casey knew it.

He went through the window, and the staggered line of the downtown city looked as if it had been cut out of stiff black cloth and hung there against the muddy blue of the sullen sky.

Casey clung to the window sill a moment with his fingertips, to steady himself, let go. He hit the gravel roof one story below, hit on his heels and went over backward. The fall shook him, but that was all, and he rolled to his knees, ran towards the fire-escape at the rear of the building.

Less than a minute later he was back on the street, huddled in the darkened doorway of a music shop, watching the *Globe* entrance. Jaeger came out first with Russo at his heels. They crossed the street to a small sedan.

Casey sidled down along the building front. He had already located his taxi. And as soon as the sedan pulled out from the curb, he was on the running-board, pounding the dozing driver, who shook himself, scowled at Casey, said:

"What the hell's the—"

"Follow that sedan," barked Casey, swinging open the rear door.

"Oh," growled the driver. "It's you, huh?" He stepped on the starter, craned his neck to get a look at the sedan as he shifted into low. "What's all this screwy followin' about?"

"About five bucks for you." Then, crisply, "Find Potter?"

The cab roared into the street and the driver said: "Yeah," and cramped the wheel for a U turn. The clock above Park Street said 11:55. There was enough traffic to screen them, but not enough to confuse their quarry with any other car.

The sedan had turned right at Boylston; the lights changed as the cab approached them, but they got a green arrow and made the turn. The theater front on the left was dark; beyond the high spiked fence on the right, the Common looked even darker. Casey leaned forward, knocked on the glass and the driver slid back the partition.

"Not too close, but if they give you the slip—"

"Give who the slip?" The driver snorted contemptuously. "Don't be crazy."

Casey grunted, took the gun out of his pocket and inspected the clip. He slipped off the safety, fondled the cold bulk of the automatic, let it rest gently in his palm. When he looked out the window again the railroad yards were slipping by on the left, and the sedan was a block and a half ahead.

They crossed the avenue, and Casey's brain fought with questions and answers. When he looked up again it was because the cab had started to slow. He saw then that the sedan was slanting in towards the curb, still a block and a half ahead. Then he saw his roadster—at least he thought it was a roadster. Yeah. They were on Alson Street.

The cab slowed still more and Casey said: "Keep going, you mugg. Right on by 'em! Don't slow down!"

He slouched on the seat as soon as he saw the two men leave the sedan and cross the sidewalk. When the cab passed the apartment house he called to the driver.

"Take another street, turn right, go around the block." He slid up on the seat, got out at the corner beyond the sedan a minute or so later. He gave the driver the promised five dollars, added: "I'll remember you. You got what it takes."

Casey spun about before the driver could thank him. As he turned into Alson Street he moved warily, and his eyes sought the shadowed niches and areaways.

Alson Street was not much different from Pratt Street. It was a little wider, and on one side, the opposite side from Casey and the parked sedan, there were some remodeled brownstone fronts. The apartments on the near side of the street were a little taller, a little more flossy and pretentious than that of Alma

Henderson's; but the reputations were about the same.

The roadster was parked nearly to the next corner, but Potter stepped from the shadows directly across the street from the sedan. Casey crossed to him and pulled him back into the areaway which had concealed him.

Potter said: "What's up?" He was a stringy, long-necked fellow who wore glasses and a perpetually tired look. "I parked the roadster down the street a ways, because I wasn't sure just what you wanted me here for."

"It's just as well," said Casey and took out the automatic.

"Hey!" wheezed Potter.

"Wade's in that apartment," Casey muttered, and went on with a brief story of what had happened. "I got you to help because I wanted to check on this address, and because no matter what happens, there's gonna be a sweet story for some guy."

"But why don't you get Logan—"

"That's your job," clipped Casey. "For all I know they might try to develop that plate inside—might be developing it now. So find a phone. There's a drug-store two blocks down. Tell Logan the set-up. He oughtta get out here pretty damn' fast."

"But what—" stammered Potter. "You ain't goin' up there and try to shoot it out with those hoods alone?"

"I hope not," Casey said grimly. "I'm gonna try and stall, throw a bluff—till Logan gets here. He'll know how to handle it; only if the shooting starts, I'm not gonna be empty handed."

Casey had left the *Globe* without his topcoat. Now he took the .38, reached around and stuck it down inside his pants, right in the small of his back. The pressure of his belt held the gun securely; the coat, draped from the shoulders, showed no suspicious bulge. He started across the street.

6

The foyer of the apartment house was U shaped and the single, self-operated elevator door was directly opposite the entrance. Casey stopped in front of it, realizing that he did not know where Jaeger and Russo had gone.

He muttered, "No one's been in or out of here since they came. They musta left the elevator where they got off," and started up the stairs.

There was no elevator at the second floor; none at the third. He found it waiting on the fourth. He thought: "It's after twelve. I'll try every place with a light in it."

Eight doors opened from the wide, deserted hall. Casey started at the front, dropping to his knees at each door and peering at the bottom crack. The first three were dark. At the fourth—the second door on the right—a hairline of yellow met his gaze.

Casey put his ear close to the keyhole. A subdued murmur of voices reached him, unexcited. He straightened a little, drew a long, silent breath, glanced, unconsciously, back over his shoulder, then bent to the keyhole again.

He felt that he could wait a few minutes, give Logan that much time. Not too long, for if the plate could not be developed here, they wouldn't waste much time in taking it where it could be, and Casey had to stall them here if he was to count on Logan's help. The slow minutes

dragged. Casey tried to estimate their number; tried once to reach his watch, but gave it up in preference to keeping his ear glued to the keyhole. Finally he straightened, took a deep breath and knocked.

After a moment a voice said: "Who is it?"

Casey grunted and his lips pressed into a weird, tight smile. The palms of his hands were damp, but he wiped them on the sides of his coat.

He said: "Santy Claus."

The knob turned slowly, but the door opened in a jerk that flung it wide. Jaeger and Russo stood to one side, their automatics leveled at Casey's stomach. Beyond, Moe Nyberg stood behind Wade, held him by the coat collar and pressed a gun in his back. Over by the windows stood Mike Handy.

Casey felt no fear now. No surprise. Rather a tense grim satisfaction gripped his brain. But after that first glimpse of the occupants of that room, he went into his act. Surprise flooded his face, choked his voice.

"Hey," he wheezed. "What the hell?"

"Get in here!" clipped Jaeger.

Casey stepped across the threshold and Russo shut the door.

"How'd you get here?" jerked Nyberg.

"He followed us," said Jaeger. "He must've—"

"Followed you?" croaked Casey, licking his lips. "No. Honest to gawd. I didn't know—"

"It's a plant!" growled Handy, starting forward. "Look in the hall." He turned and looked out the windows at the street below.

Russo opened the door, peered out, said: "Naw. It's clear."

Handy said: "Clear outside too," and relaxed.

Nyberg purred: "You'd better spill it, Flash. And you'd better make it good. How did you find us?"

Casey was stuck here, and he knew it. To tell the truth about either Wade's taxi-driver, or his following the two gunmen would probably scare Handy into moving them out of the apartment— before Logan could get there.

So he let his imagination go, and made up his story as he went along. How logical it sounded did not particularly bother him; he wanted to make it interesting—and take plenty of time.

"A taxi guy told me," he said nervously. "Wade said he took the Henderson woman downstairs after the raid, and a couple tough looking muggs picked her up. Well, he was stuck on the girl; see? And he thought something might be up. But he couldn't run out on me, so he got a taxi-driver to follow this other car and find out where these two guys went.

"When the cabby came back to the office, Wade was out. He got worried about his pay so he looked me up. I took care of the fare and he gave me this address—just before you two came to the *Globe*." He nodded at Russo and Jaeger. "Maybe you saw him go out and—"

"Go on!" pressed Nyberg ominously.

"Well," Casey shrugged. "I wasn't sure of the set-up so I thought I'd do some checking."

"Oh," grunted Nyberg. He looked relieved and loosed his hold on Wade.

Casey, apparently still bewildered, glanced around. Jaeger brushed his mustache with an index finger and smiled again. Nyberg pushed Wade down on the divan. He was a sturdily built fellow, Nyberg. Bald, greasy-looking, with a heavy red nose and a thick-lipped mouth. His dress was slovenly, his fingernails dirty. Casey-met his shrewd stare for a moment, then glanced at Handy.

Mike Handy looked worried. There was a film of moisture on his fatty face, and his eyes, which were black and seemed all iris, shifted nervously from the door to the windows beside him. The fingers of his other hand, which hung loosely at his side, moved spasmodically.

Wade said: "You were wrong about her, Flash."

Casey did not answer, or look at Wade. He gave no sign that he had heard, because he did not want to let on what he knew—not yet.

Then Handy said: "Let's get out of here. I don't like it. If we get caught in here—" He moved to a chair and picked up his black topcoat.

Nyberg nodded and stepped towards Wade. And Casey felt his nerves grow taut. They couldn't leave. Logan would never find them. He decided to tell what he knew—all of it. Gambling that his revelations would hold attention, postpone the present plan.

"How was I wrong about her?" he growled, and turned on Wade. "She got you to her place so these guys could take you, didn't she? She put you on the spot and—"

"So—" breathed Nyberg, "this surprise business was an act? You know about that, huh?"

"Sure," said Casey and made his voice confident, aggressive. "I oughtta. I was there when we trapped your other two hoods—in fact, I shot the stocky guy right over the eye. He's in the morgue now."

"She didn't spot me," Wade said, and Handy's gasp was a background for his words.

Casey felt the sudden tenseness in the room, but he watched the young photographer. Wade was sitting on the divan with his elbows on his knees and his head down. His voice was listless; so was his attitude. He acted as though he did not care what happened, and Casey knew, in such condition, he could get little help from Wade in a showdown.

"She was on the level," Wade went on. "You know why she chased me out of the office this afternoon? Because these guys—all but Handy—were in the next room. She was scared—for me, and for herself. She got me out and hoped to run for it.

"But these two guys"—he nodded at Jaeger and Russo—"ran down the back way and picked her up. She told 'em I didn't know a thing. Then, when she called me at the *Globe*"—Wade hesitated, continued wearily—"that was okey. Only—"

"To hell with all this crap," barked Nyberg. "What else do you know, smart guy?"

"Plenty," said Casey and grinned deliberately. "I know about Dopey Donlan, and the private dick, and the dope ring you were promoting at the tracks, and how you hooked that up with that track gambling outfit that got raided."

"You spoke your piece, smart guy," Nyberg said and his thick lips twisted in a mirthless smile, "and now you're in it up to your neck. You're gonna find out just how it feels."

Handy put on his coat. "Let's get out of here. There's something screwy about this. I don't like it."

The sweat was on his forehead again and his lip trembled. "You, Russo, put the gun on the kid. Nyberg, Jaeger, watch Casey. Better search him first." He waited while Jaeger patted Casey's pockets, and Casey held his breath and stuck out his stomach, stuck it out and leaned so that his back arched slightly and the unbuttoned coat hung out and away from the gun.

"We'll take 'em out," Handy went on. "If this plate is okey, I'm set."

"You're set?" sneered Nyberg. "How about me—the rest of us."

"Well," flared Handy. "I was in that raid this afternoon. Lucky they let me go after I paid the fine. If anybody'd seen me come out of that washroom—"

"Nerts!" said Nyberg. "I'm getting' sick of your angles. Why all the panic? Why don't we knock these guys off right here and now?"

"No—no," said Handy, and his voice was shrill. "Take them out. I pay you plenty. I want a chance to get this plate developed, get an alibi."

"You're with us," snapped Nyberg contemptuously, "and here's once you stay with us. I'm beginnin' to hate guys like you—all mouth and no guts." He stepped to Wade, yanked him to his feet. "Come on, Kid."

Casey waited there by the door. He was glad now that he had put on the bluff. It had worked longer than he expected. But was it long enough? He couldn't tell. It was hard to judge time in this kind of a spot. And you could say things awfully quick. How much time had he killed? Five—six minutes. More, he hoped.

Russo had stepped over behind Wade. Handy opened the door and looked into the hall. Nyberg and Jaeger came alongside of Casey and he felt the guns in his side.

Casey made one more attempt to stall. "Say." He let the fear come into his voice. "What're you gonna do. You can't—"

"Who can't," sneered Nyberg. "You know what we're gonna do—so quit stallin'. You can take it, can't you? Or is all these things I've heard about you just a lot of hot air."

He dug his gun into Casey's ribs, and they went out into the hall. Handy, and Wade and the bull-necked Russo; then Casey and Nyberg and the grimly smiling Jaeger.

7

The elevator was still waiting in the hall. On the silent downward trip, Casey tried to map out some logical course of action. Logan had not arrived. Otherwise he would have been waiting in the hall.

The elevator door slid open and they started across the narrow, dimly lighted foyer. Casey felt the reassuring pressure of his gun in his back. He thought he could get to it. But there were three other guns—and there was Wade.

The kid did not know about Casey's gun. He would have no tip-off to a plan, even if Casey had one. And if the heat went on—

Handy paused after they went through the inner doors. There, in the imitation marble entryway, he said:

"It's too risky—six of us piling in that little sedan. Besides, we've used it twice today—we might get picked up. We'll just walk

down the street easy-like. I've got a car in a garage around the corner."

He hesitated and the dim light from the foyer, sifting through the glass doors, made his fatty-face jaundiced and shiny with moisture. He made one more plea.

"I'll make it a grand more apiece if you'll let me—"

This time it was Jaeger who voiced his contemptuous opinion. "I'll string with Nyberg. It'll be worth my grand to see you play ball."

Handy opened the outer door without answering. Nyberg said: "Keep your hands down and walk nice, guys."

Handy kept well in the lead, but the rest of them fanned out on the wide sidewalk. Casey cast a quick glance up and down the street and a blanket of dejection settled down upon him. His roadster was parked in the same spot, but the street was deserted. Logan had not—

Then he saw Potter.

At first there was but a blacker blotch in the shadows of that entryway across the street. Then the blotch took shape. It was Potter all right, his stringy height identified him. He was on the sidewalk now, and he was starting across the street.

Casey sucked in his breath and held it. His glance slid sidewise. Wade was about an arm's length away, on his left, the curb side; beside, and slightly behind, walked Russo. Holding the same position—beside and a pace behind—Nyberg and Jaeger flanked Casey.

Casey had wanted to wait as long as he could in the hope that Logan might come. And if he did not come, that gun was the last resort.

He and Wade? Well, they were in it: they had to take a chance, accept the risk. But Potter, the crazy fool: it was no affair of his. And he was married and—

“Moe!” Jaeger’s voice was soft, jerky. “There’s a guy comin’ across the street.”

“Let him come,” said Nyberg hoarsely. “If he horns in we might just as well shoot the works and—”

Then Potter, now halfway across the street, said: “Hey!”

It was absurd, that word. And Potter’s act, although he may not have known it, was suicidal. Casey inwardly cursed it as such. Yet that soft call undoubtedly gave him a second to get set, because every man but himself glanced at Potter as he spoke.

Casey leaned to the left and made a vicious backhand swipe with the flat of his hand. He caught Wade alongside the face and the force of the blow knocked him off his feet, so that he fell over against Russo, carrying him to his knees. At the same instant, Casey’s right hand reached for the gun in his back.

He forgot Wade as he spun about and his fingers found the butt of the automatic, but he was aware that somebody was fighting in the gutter. Then he had the gun free, up, and squeezed the trigger, twice, rapidly.

Nyberg’s body jerked. Beside him and two feet away a flash of orange exploded and Casey felt something slice between his ribs and his left arm.

The slug, the flash of flame, came from Jaeger’s gun. And as he fired, the fellow stepped behind Nyberg’s sagging body, intent on using it as a shield.

Casey’s finger already tensed for a third shot when he saw what he faced. He had but little time to act, and he did as impulse commanded. He ducked his head and half dived forward so that his shoulder crashed into Nyberg’s stomach.

They went down, all three of them. And Jaeger was underneath. He was cursing now and so was Casey, although he did not know it. For a moment or so the three men were a tangle of arms and legs, and as they scrambled there, Casey thought he heard the shrill scream of a siren.

Then Jaeger rolled clear, rolled clear and came to his knees. Casey’s right hand was partly pinioned by the now limp weight of Nyberg’s body. He yanked at the wrist, felt the gun come free. But his eyes had never left Jaeger, and he knew he was too late.

The fellow’s teeth flashed in some reflected ray of the street light, and the gun leveled as Casey tried to swing up his hand in time. A hundredth part of a second maybe; no longer than that. But Casey looked down the muzzle of that gun and his muscles tensed for the shock.

Somebody said: “You-----!”

The crash of the gun wiped out the phrase, pounded at Casey’s right ear, half deafened him. And he could not understand it because he had seen no flash from that gun muzzle.

A car roared past. Jaeger, still on his knees, began to tip over, half on his face, half on his side. When his shoulders hit the sidewalk Casey looked around. Potter was standing three feet away. His right hand was still stiffly extended— and there was a gun in it.

Casey blew out his pent-up breath and spun about on his knees. Handy was fifty yards

away, racing madly for the corner, his coat-tails flying. A touring car swung into the curb beside him.

There was a shouted command, another. Handy raced on, swerving towards an entryway. The car kept pace. Then flame streaked through the night and two sharp cracks slapped down the street, reverberating from the brick walls. Handy took three more steps at breakneck speed. He stumbled; he slid forward on his face like Rabbit Maranville stealing home.

8

Captain Judson put his fists on his hips and said: "You get in the damnedest messes."

"It took you long enough to get here," Casey said grimly.

Logan was looking down at Nyberg. Wade sat on the curb. Potter still held the gun. He lifted his arm, stared at the automatic, dropped the arm again. He kept doing it, as though he could not believe he had used it. And all the time he was saying: "Jeeze—jeeze," in thick, hushed tones.

There were two police cars in the street now, and overhead windows were up, and heads and shoulders in whitish nightclothes hung on the sills.

Logan said: "Looks like the only guy left is Russo." He stared at the bullet-headed fellow who stood flanked by two plain-clothesmen. "How did we miss him?"

Casey had told what had taken place in the apartment, finished with: "Don't ask me. I only-knocked Wade into him. After that—"

"You damn' near knocked me out," Wade said. "I thought he was gonna let me have

it. He could have easy enough. But I guess Potter—" he broke off.

Potter coughed, spoke apologetically. "They were both on the ground, but I saw this guy start to swing his gun around, so I kicked him in the head and took it away from him." He hesitated, looked at Casey. "Then when I saw how you were fixed—well, I had to let him have it."

"You had to do it, huh?" Casey said, and grinned wryly. "I guess it's a break for me you felt that way about it."

"I never shot anyone before," Potter said. "I was afraid I'd miss. I got as close as I could."

Logan said: "You newspaper guys do pretty well for amateurs."

Casey looked down at Nyberg, cursed once, said: "I'm glad I got that-----anyway."

An ambulance pulled into the curb. Then Casey realized that he was shivering, that he had no coat. And his side was smarting; he thought his undershirt was wet. He told Logan about it and one of the internes started to take him into the apartment house foyer.

Casey turned to Wade. "Come on, snap into it. My camera's down in my roadster. Get busy."

Judson watched the interne strap up Casey's side. The wound was superficial, grazing the ribs and cutting a shallow, two-inch furrow in the flesh.

Casey glanced up at Judson and let his voice get disgusted. "What a help you turned out to be."

Judson scowled. "What's the matter with you?"

"Was that picture I got this afternoon a break for you?"

"Sure it was a break. That tipped the business. We'd got Handy eventually—on that alone."

"Yeah," fumed Casey. "But if you'd had your way there wouldn't been any picture. I just happened to hold out that print." He snorted disdainfully. "Callin' up the office and tellin' 'em we can't print it."

"Who called up?"

"You did."

Judson's eyes widened, then narrowed. His voice had a humorous undertone.

"Maybe a scratch on the ribs makes you slug-nutty or something. You talk that way. Hell"— he grunted, pulled at his nose—"Whenever you steal a picture on me I don't want printed I won't call the office. I'll take it away from you myself—like Haley did with your second one."

Casey scowled for a moment; then his eyes got sultry and he said: "Oh," softly.

Wade took six pictures. Casey had the three plate-holders in his pocket when they went into the *Globe* city room. Blaine was at the desk.

Casey who had been talking to Wade all the way in, pulled him to a stop before they crossed the room. "Listen, Kid. Shake it off. I know how you feel. And if it helps any, you were right, and I was wrong, like most wise guys are."

"She wasn't a tramp—she just ran with tramps. She had two strikes on her, just working for a guy like Nyberg. That's not your fault."

"But if I could have helped her or—"

"Sure, I know." Casey pulled Wade across the room. "We did the best we could. After all, she sorta put you on the spot by even callin' you to her place. But she was level with you and she did what she could with what she had to do with."

"I guess you're right," Wade said and seemed to shrug off some of his dejection. "Only I sorta liked her."

Blaine leaned back in his chair and his eyes were cold and unsmiling.

Casey said: "Did Potter phone in the story?"

"Yes."

"Well, I got a story you're gonna hear and—"

"And I've got one for you," snapped Blaine. "You're fired!"

Casey's jaw dropped, and Wade stiffened and froze there.

"Fired?" Casey swallowed, and amazement gave ground slowly before his anger.

He choked on a curse and had a hard time getting his words out. Not because he was fired. That had happened before. What threw him off stride was that Blaine had stolen his thunder, had taken the offensive right out of his hands.

"All right," he clipped. "I'm fired. One of your ideas huh?"

"It was Fessendon's idea," said Blaine. He lifted some copy paper from a halftone cut. Beside the metal plate was a proof. The proof

was of the picture Casey had given Logan. "I think this cut came up from the engraving room by mistake, but Fessendon saw the proof. You held out on him, huh?"

"And a damn' good thing I did," flung out Casey. He put both hands on the desk top and leaned on them. He held that position while he told Blaine the whole story about that picture, what it meant to the police, how it had been used to bargain with and the reason he had had a halftone made.

There was a peculiar gleam in Blaine's eyes now. Casey saw it, but he could not fathom it. It was hard, intent, yet there seemed to be something in the background. It couldn't be humor— a grim sort of humor—

Casey flung aside the thought, and with this mental effort some of his rage evaporated. That first hot burst at Blaine's announcement came from impulsive reaction; but as the true character of the situation, as the underlying significance of the city editor's attitude dawned upon him, a new kind of anger fastened itself upon him. Anger that was logical and mixed with weariness, disillusionment, resentment.

This feeling was strange to Casey, strange but not hard to understand. He had been going at top speed since four-thirty that afternoon. The past five hours had been crammed with action, and death, and a nerve-wracking tension that centered around the safety of Tom Wade.

Perhaps it was this strain that brought about that hollow feeling of discouragement; it might have been that he was tired, that his head ached, or that the wound in his side had left him weakened. More probably it was because Blaine had let him down. Blaine, the sharp-tongued, unsympathetic driver—who always backed up his men.

"All right," Casey said finally. "I'll be glad to go." His voice was husky, a bit scornful now, his smoldering anger and resentment tinging each word.

"I only stuck here because you had something on the ball, and because I always thought you were on the level. I had you figured for the one newspaperman in town who would print the news as he saw it and not let some fat-headed guy with a lot of money call you.

"But if Fessendon's got you, if you can't take it, if you're gonna do what he says and like it"— Casey breathed deeply, tightened his lips—"why, that's okey with me. I knew damn' well I had the right dope when you pulled that Judson gag. But I never thought you were a liar."

"Who's a liar? What about Judson?" said Blaine, and his voice got thin.

"Just like I said. He didn't call here and tell you or Fessendon to kill that picture. I asked him."

"He didn't—" Blaine got up slowly, menacingly and leaned across the desk.

"It was that skirt-crazy Lee Fessendon that—"

Blaine spun about and started through the doorway behind his desk. Casey followed him, still talking. And Wade, goggle-eyed and with nothing else to do, tagged behind. Blaine moved to Fessendon's office with stiff-kneed strides, threw open the door.

Fessendon looked up from his desk, started to smile. The smile faded when Blaine spoke.

"You said Judson told you we had to kill Casey's picture."

"He—he did," said Fessendon, avoiding Blaine's stare.

"Casey says Judson said no such thing."

"Well," Fessendon stood up and his pink face got red and scowling. "Are you going to take his word against mine?"

"Any time," rapped Blaine, "and anywhere. I told you when I stayed on here I'd run this sheet my way or not at all. You framed up the Judson gag because neither you—nor your kid brother had guts enough to stand up and—"

"You can't talk that way to me," stormed Fessendon.

"You hear me, don't you?"

Fessendon took a menacing step forward. "I'm running this paper. Suppose Lee did call me up and tell me about that picture? I don't take orders from you, Blaine, and—"

"You said it." Blaine's lip curled. "Maybe you take them from that jelly-kneed brother who was afraid to face a bawling out from his wife."

"You're fired," shouted Fessendon.

"That makes two of us," said Blaine.

"Three," piped up Wade.

"And I have one thing more to toss in the pot," Blaine rapped. "Plenty of fellows think I'm a slave driver; I don't doubt they hate my guts. But I've had one sort of a reputation. I played the game and I played it square. Casey's the first man that ever said I wasn't on the level: the first guy that ever called me a liar—and I can't blame him.

"I hate a liar, too, Fessendon. I hate a double-crosser. And that's what you are, a lousy, lying, double-crossing-----!"

Fessendon hit Blaine then. Hit him back of the ear and Blaine went down. Casey cursed and stepped forward, but Blaine sat up, said: "You stay out of this."

He got to his feet and deliberately repeated his opinion. Fessendon, his face a livid mask, swung his right. This time Blaine was ready. He said: "I thought so," as he moved inside that right and jabbed his left to Fessendon's stomach.

Fessendon gasped and he seemed to gag as he crumpled. Then Blaine crossed his right. It landed flush and it straightened Fessendon before it dropped him.

Blaine backed away, turned at the door. Casey and Wade followed him out. Blaine went to his desk, opened the bottom drawer, took out a brief case and systematically packed it with his personal belongings. He closed all the drawers, stepped over to the clothes-tree and got his hat and coat. As he stepped past the grinning Casey and the open-mouthed Wade, he turned, spoke irritably:

"Well, come on, you big ox. Don't stand their gawking."

In the hall Casey said: "Did Fessendon tell you to fire me?"

"Sure," said Blaine, punching the elevator button. "If I hadn't he would have."

"But you knew I had some redhot plates of that—"

"I didn't *know* you had 'em," said Blaine. "But you generally pull something out of the hat, and I wanted to fire you before you showed them to me. Then you could take them down

the street to the *Express* or *Mirror*—not that you need anything to bargain with.”

Blaine muttered a soft curse. “You got a dirty deal from Fessendon, but you ought to be glad you’re out. I was all washed up with him anyway, after he broke that plate—as if we were a bunch of blackmailers. But he just came in his office about ten minutes ago, and I was going to be nice about it and give him two weeks’ notice.”

Casey’s broad face was cracked in a wide grin that would not come off. He was no longer tired. It was good to be free of Fessendon, to

know that Blaine was level, that Wade was okay. He released a sigh of satisfaction and relief, said:

“Well, where we goin’ now?”

“I’m gonna call up Gilman at the *Express* and see if he wants a city editor and a couple of cheap cameras. But first”—the elevator door opened and Blaine stepped in—“we’ll stop at Steve’s and have a couple to celebrate on.” Casey said: “You think of things.” Wade grunted sardonically, said: “The idea is okay so long as I don’t get stuck with short beers.”