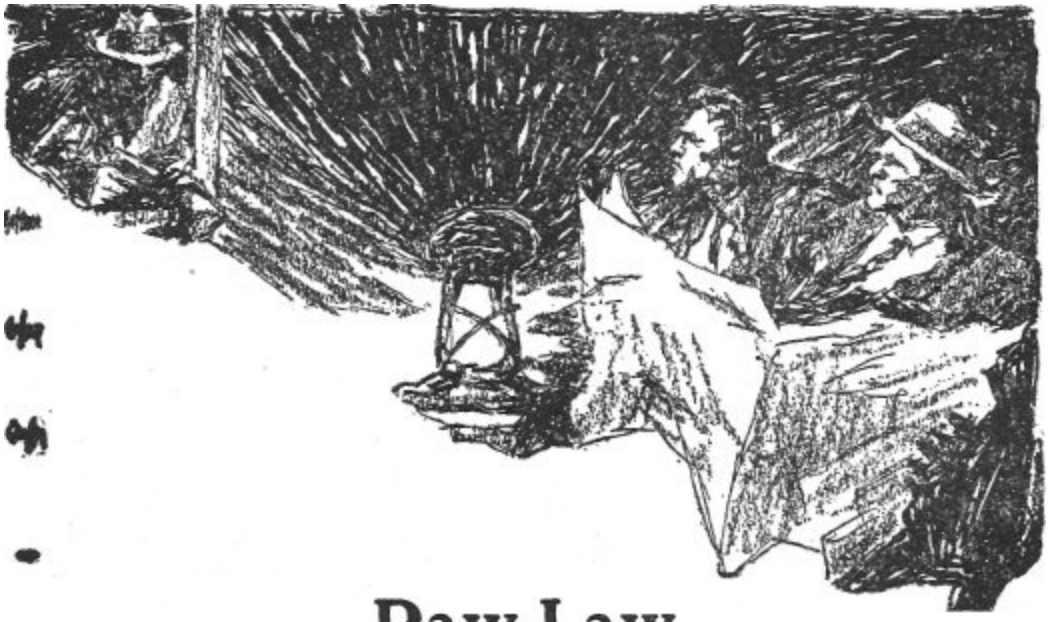
The Crimes of Richmond City
Frederick Nebel

WRITING IN THE MIDST of the Great Depression, Frederick Nebel (1903-1967) wrote prolifically for *Black Mask, Dime Detective*, and other pulps, producing scores of relatively realistic hard-boiled stories about such fixtures of their era as Cardigan, the hard-as-nails Irish operative working for the Cosmos Agency in St. Louis; tough dick Donny Donahue of the Interstate Agency; and, most important, the long-running stories about Captain Steve MacBride and the ever-present local reporter, Kennedy, who frequently takes over a story and does as much crime solving as the official member of the police department.

Nebel had two mystery novels published during his lifetime, *Sleepers East* (1934) and *Fifty Roads to Town* (1936). *The Crimes of Richmond City*, a powerful depiction of violence and corruption, has never before appeared in book form. It was published as five separate episodes in *Black Mask* in the issues of September 1928 through May 1929.

Publishing novels in serial form was common for *Black Mask* in this era, as it was responsible for such important works as Dashiell Hammett's first four novels, *Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, The Maltese Falcon*, and *The Glass Key*, as well as Paul Cain's *Fast One* and many of Carroll John Daly's books.



Raw Law

Frederick Nebel

A city of graft and crime; a man's buddy, a victim;
then the deadly game of vengeance—and justice

1

CAPTAIN STEVE MacBride was a tall square-shouldered man of forty more or less hard-bitten years. He had a long, rough-chiseled face, steady eyes, a beak of a nose, and a wide, firm mouth that years of fighting his own and others' wills had hardened. His face shone ruddily, cleanly, as if it were used to frequent and vigorous contact with soap and water. For eighteen years he had been connected, in one capacity or another, with Richmond City's police department, and Richmond City today is a somewhat hectic community of almost a hundred-thousand population.

MacBride sat in his office at Police Headquarters. He sat at his shining oak desk, in a swivel chair, smoking a blackened briar pipe, with the latest copy of the Richmond City *Free Press* spread before him. In one corner a steam radiator clanked and hissed intermittently. There were a half dozen chairs lined against the wall behind him. The floor was of cement, the ceiling was high and, like the walls, a light, impersonal tan. About the room there was something hollow and clean and efficient. About the borders of the two windows at MacBride's left there were irregular frames of snow left by a recent blizzard. But the room was warm and, except for the clanking of the radiator, quite silent.

Reading on, MacBride sometimes moved in his chair or took his pipe from his mouth to purse his lips, it seemed a little grimly and ironically. Once he muttered something behind clenched teeth, way down in the cavern of his throat. Presently he let the paper drop and sat back, drawing silently on his pipe and letting his eyes wander back and forth over the collection of photographs tacked on the bulletin board on

the wall before him—photographs of men wanted for robbery, murder, and homicide. One of the telephones on his desk rang. He took off the receiver, listened, said, "Send him in." Then he leaned back again and swung his chair to face the door.

It opened presently, and a man neatly dressed in a blue overcoat and a gray fedora strolled in. A cigarette was drooping from one corner of his mouth. He had a young-old face, a vague smile, and the whimsical eyes of the wicked and wise.

"Hello, Cap." He kicked the door shut with his heel and leaned against it, indolently, as if he were a little weary—not in his bones, but with life.

"Hello, Kennedy," nodded MacBride. "Sit down."

"Thanks."

Kennedy dropped into a chair, unbuttoned his overcoat, but did not remove it.

MacBride creaked in his chair, looked at the newspaper on his desk and said, with a brittle chuckle, "Thanks for the editorial."

"Don't thank me, Mac."

"Your sheet's trying to ride us, eh?"

"Our business is to ride everybody we can."

"M-m-m. I know."

Kennedy knocked the ash from his cigarette. "Of course, it's tough on you." He smiled, shrugged. "I know your hands are tied."

"Eh?" MacBride's eyes steadied.

"You heard me, Mac. This little boy knows a lot. Y'know, *you* don't run the Department."

MacBride's lips tightened over his pipe.

"*You*," went on Kennedy, "would like to put the clamps on this dirty greaseball, Cavallo. Now wouldn't you?"

MacBride's eyes narrowed, and he took his pipe from his mouth. "Would I?" His hand knotted over the hot bowl of the pipe.

"Sure you would. But—" Kennedy shrugged—"you can't."

"Listen, Kennedy. What did you come here for, to razz me?"

"I don't know why I came here. It was cold out, and I know you keep it warm here. And— well, I just thought I'd drop in for a chat."

"You thought you'd get some inside dope. Go ahead, come out with it. Well, Kennedy, I've got nothing to say. News is as tight here as a drum-head. What a bunch of wise-cracking eggs you've got down in your dump. Gink Cavallo'll laugh himself into a bellyache when he reads it. The lousy bum!"

"Something's got to break, Mac. When a bootlegging greaseball starts to run a town, starts to run the Department, something's got to break."

"He's not running *me*!" barked MacBride.

"The hell he isn't! Don't tell me. I'm no greenhorn, Mac. Maybe not you personally. But your hands are tied. He's running somebody else, and somebody else is running somebody else, and the last somebody else is running you!"

"You're talking through your hat, Kennedy."

"Oh, am I? No, I can't lay my hands on it all, but I can use my head. I know a few things. I know that Gink Cavallo is one of the wisest wops that ever packed a rod. He's a brother-in-law to Tony Diorio, and Diorio is president of the Hard Club, and the Hard Club swings two thousand sure votes and a thousand possible votes. And, you know, Mac, that these wops stick together. Most of the bohunks in the mills are wops, and they've sworn by the Hard Club, and—get this, Mac—it was the Hard Club that put Pozzo in for alderman and Mulroy for state's attorney. And it's the state's attorney's office that's running the Department—the rottenest administration in the history of Richmond City. It's just putting two and two together.

"You can't move, Mac. You've got your orders—hands off. What can you do? You're a captain. You've been with the Department for eighteen years. You've got a wife and a kid, and if you were kicked out of the Department you'd be on the rocks. I know you hate Cavallo like poison, and I know you're just aching to take a crack at him. It sure is a tough break for you, Mac."

MacBride had not batted an eye-lash, had not shone by the slightest flicker of eyes or expression, how he took Kennedy's speech. He drew on his pipe meditatively, looking down along his beak of a nose. It was in the heart of MacBride that seas of anger were crashing and tumbling. Because Kennedy was right; he had hit the nail on the head with every charge. But MacBride was not the man to whimper or to go back on the Department. Loyalty had been ground into him long years ago—loyalty to his badge.

His voice was casual, "Finished, Kennedy? Then run along. I'm busy."

"I know, Mac. Kind of touched you on the quick, eh? It's all right, old-timer. Your jaw's sealed, too. You'd be one hell of a fool to tell Steve Kennedy how right he is. Well." Kennedy got up and lit a fresh butt. "It's all right by me, Cap. But when the big noise breaks, don't forget yours truly. It can't go on, Mac. Somebody'll slip. Some guy'll yap for more than his share. I've seen these rotten conditions before—'Frisco, Chicago, New Orleans. I'm hard-boiled as hell, Mac, and there's no one pulling any wool over my eyes. I'm just standing by and laughing up my sleeve." He took a pull on his cigarette. "There's one wild Mick in your outfit who's very liable to spill the beans, get himself shoved out to the sticks and maybe poked in the ribs with a bullet, besides."

"You mean—?"

"Sure. Jack Cardigan. S' long, Mac."

"Good bye, Kennedy."

When the door closed, MacBride let go of himself. He heaved to his feet, spread-legged, his fists clenched, his eyes narrowed and burning intensely.

"God, Kennedy, if you only *knew* how right you are!" he muttered. "If I was only single—if I hadn't Anna and Judith. I'm tied all around, dammit! Home—and *here*!" He sank back into his chair, his head drooping, age creeping upon him visibly.

2

He was sitting there, in precisely the same position, fifteen minutes later. And fifteen minutes later the door swung open swiftly, silently, and Jack Cardigan came in. A tall, lean, dark-eyed man, this Cardigan, rounding thirty years. Men said he was reckless, case-hardened, and a flash with the gun. He was.

"You look down at the mouth, Steve," he said, offhand.

"I am, Jack. Kennedy—"

"Oh, that guy!"

"Kennedy dropped in to pay me a call. Sharp, that bird. Pulls ideas out of the air, and every idea hits you like a sock on the jaw."

"Been razzing you?"

"Has he! Jack, he's got the whole thing worked out to a T. He'd just need my O.K. to spill the whole beans to the public, and likely Police Headquarters'd be mobbed. He's right. He's got the right slant on the whole dirty business. Jack, if I was ten years younger, I'd tell the Big Boss to go to hell and take my chances. That lousy wop is sitting on top of the world, and his gang's got Richmond City tied by the heels."

Cardigan sat down on the edge of a chair. There was something on his mind. You could see that much. He tapped with his fingers on the desk, his lips were a little set, the muscle lumps at either side of his jaw quivered, his dark eyes were close-lidded, active, flashing back and forth across MacBride's face.

"Brace up, Steve," he clipped. "I've got some news that might knock you for a row of pins."

"Eh?" MacBride straightened in his chair.

Cardigan's lips curled. "I came up alone. The sergeant said Kennedy'd gone up to see you. Didn't notice if he'd left. So I came up beforehand—to see."

"Kennedy left fifteen minutes ago. What's up?"

"Enough!" Cardigan took a vicious crack at the desk with his doubled fist. "The dirty pups got Hanley!"

"What!" MacBride's chair creaked violently. He leaned forward, laid his hand on Cardigan's knee, his breath sucked in and held.

"Two shots—through the lung and the heart! Somebody's going to pay for this, Steve! Joe Hanley was my partner—my sister's husband! There's nobody'll stop me—nobody! I'll—"

"Just a minute, Jack," cut in MacBride gently. "How'd it happen?"

Cardigan got a grip on his temper, bit his lip. "I was out at Joe's place for dinner tonight, on Webster Road. Marion was a little upset. Kid had a bad cold, and she had a streak of worrying on, just like her. I mind five years ago, how she used to say she'd never marry a cop. She used to worry about me all the time. Not that a cop wasn't good enough—hell no. But she used to say if she married a cop she'd be laying awake all night worrying. So, like a woman, she married Joe, and Joe's been a buddy of mine since we were kids. Well, you know that. Then she had two to worry over—Joe and me.

"And she was worrying tonight. Joe laughed. So did I. She got me alone in the hall and told me to watch out for Joe. She'd always been doing this. I kidded her. She said she meant it, and that she felt something was going to happen. I remember how she hung on to him when we breezed. God!"

"Steady, Jack!"

"I know. Well, Joe and I hoofed it to the park, to get a bus into the city. There was none in sight, so we began hiking down Webster Road till one'd come. Pretty lonesome there. A car came weaving down behind us, and we heard a girl scream. We turned around and held up our hands for it to stop. The driver swerved to one

side, intending to duck us. He slid into a ditch, roared his motor trying to get out. The girl was yelling hysterically. We saw her pitch out of the car. Then it heaved out of the ditch and was getting under way when Joe hopped it, pulling his rod. Two shots slammed out, and Joe keeled. I had my hands full with the girl. The car skidded and crashed into the bushes.

"I had my rod out then and ran up. Two guys in the back had jumped out and ducked into the bushes. I nailed the chauffeur. He wasn't heeled, but he was trying to get away, too. He started giving me a line and I socked him on the head so he'd stay put till I looked after Joe. Well, there wasn't much to look after. Joe was dead. The girl—she was only a flapper—was bawling and shaking in the knees. She'd been pretty well mauled. A machine came along and I stopped it."

"Wait. You say you got the chauffeur?"

"Sure. He says his name's Clark, and he's downstairs, barking for a lawyer."

"Who's the girl?"

"Pearl Carr's her name. Just a wise little flapper who thought she was smart by taking a ride. She was waiting for a bus—she told me this— when this big touring car stopped and one of the guys offered her a lift. Sure, she got in, the little fool, and these guys started playing around."

"Know the guys?"

Cardigan growled. "Two of Cavallo's guns or I don't know anything. Her description of one tallies with Bert Geer, that walking fashion-plate. You remember two years ago they nabbed Geer on suspicion for that girl out in St. Louis they found strangled near Grand Gardens. But he got out of it. The other guy sounds like that rat 'Monkey' Burns. I took the number of the touring car. I looked up the records downstairs and found the plates had been stolen from a sedan two weeks ago. If they're Geer and Burns, it means that Cavallo's in the pot, too, because they're the wop's right-hand guns. If we make them take the rap, they'll draw in Cavallo, and just as sure as you're born Diorio and Pozzo and our estimable State's Attorney Mulroy'll get in the tangle, and there'll be hell to pay all around. But I'm going through with this, Steve, and the state's attorney's office be damned! Joe was my buddy, closer to me than a brother—my sister's husband! God—can you picture Marion!"

MacBride was tight-lipped, a little pale, terribly grim. The ultimate had come. Would they tie the Department's hands now?

"Did you let Clark get a lawyer?" he asked.

"No—cripes, no!"

"Then get him up here. Where's the girl?"

"Downstairs, still bawling. I sent a cop out to get her a dress or something. I phoned her old man and he's driving in to get her."

"All right. Leave her there. But get Clark."

Cardigan went out and MacBride settled back, heaved a vast sigh, crammed fresh tobacco into his pipe. When, a few moments later, the door opened, he was puffing serenely, though deep in his heart there was a great numbness.

Clark came in, aided by a shove in the rear from Cardigan. The detective closed the door, grabbed Clark by the shoulder and slammed him not too gently into a chair.

"Say, go easy there, guy!" whined Clark, a charred clinker of a runt, with a face of seeming innocence, like a mongrel dog.

"Close your jaw!" snapped Cardigan.'

Clark spread his hands toward MacBride. "Tell this guy to leave me alone, Captain. He's been treatin' me hard. First off he beans me with his gat and since then he's been chuckin' me around like I was a rag. I got my rights. I'm a citizen. You can't go cloutin' citizens. I got my—"

"Soft pedal," said MacBride heavily. "So your name's Clark, eh? How'd you come to be driving that car?"

"I was drivin' it, that's all. I'm all right. I don't know nothin'. I was just drivin' it. You can't make a slop-rag outta me."

"Shut up," cut in MacBride.

"All right, I'll shut up. That's what I'm gonna do. You gotta let me get a lawyer. I got rights. Them's a citizen's rights."

"Listen to the bum!" chuckled Cardigan.

"There, see!" chirped Clark. "He's still insultin' me. He's just a big wise guy, he is. I got my rights. I'll see you get yours, fella. I was drivin' a car. All right, I was drivin' it. I know you guys. I ain't gotta talk."

"You're going to talk, Clark," said MacBride ominously. "And none of this cheap chatter, either. Talk that counts—see?"

"I ain't. No, I ain't. I want a lawyer. Gimme that phone."

He scrambled out of the chair, clawed for the telephone. Cardigan grabbed him by the nape of the neck, hurled him back so hard that Clark hit the chair aslant and, knocking it over, sprawled with it to the floor. He crouched, cringing, blubbering.

"You leave me alone, you! What the hell you think you're doin'? You leave me—"

"Get up—get up," gritted Cardigan. "That's only a smell compared with what's coming if you don't come clean. Get up, you dirty little rat!" He reached down, caught Clark, heaved him up and banged him down into another chair.

Clark's teeth chattered. His hands fidgeted, one with the other. His mouth worked, gasping for breath. His eyes almost popped from his head.

"Now," came MacBride's low voice, "who were the two guys that got away?"

"You can't make me talk now. You can't!" Clark gripped the sides of his chair, the stringy cords on his neck bulged. "I ain't talkin'—not me. I want a lawyer—that's what. Them's my rights, gettin' a lawyer. There!" He stuck out his chin defiantly.

MacBride turned in his chair and looked at Cardigan. Cardigan nodded, his fingers opening and closing.

"Take him into the sweat room, Jack," said MacBride. "Sweat him."

Clark stiffened in his chair, and sucked in his nether lip with a sharp intake of breath. He writhed.

"You can't do that, you can't!" he screamed. "I got my rights. You can't beat up a citizen."

"Citizen, are you?" chuckled Cardigan. "You're a bum, Clark. You were driving a car with somebody else's plates. You tried to get away with the other two birds but you weren't fast enough. My buddy was killed, see? Now you'll talk. I'll sweat it out of you, Clark, so help me!"

"You won't! I ain't gonna talk. Gawd almighty, I want a lawyer! You can't stop me from gettin' one!"

"You're stopped, Clark," bit off Cardigan. "Get up and come on along with me."

Cardigan reached for him. Clark squirmed in his chair, lashed out with his feet. One foot caught Cardigan in the stomach and he doubled momentarily, grimacing but silent. MacBride was out of his seat in a flash, and Clark was jerked to his feet so fast that he lost his breath. He was wild-eyed, straining at the arms that held him, his lips quivering, groans and grunts issuing from his throat.

"You ain't gonna beat me—you ain't! You'll see! I won't talk! I got my rights. I—I—"

"I'll take him, Steve," said Cardigan.

MacBride stepped back and Clark struggled frantically in Cardigan's grasp as the latter worked him toward the door.

The telephone bell jangled.

"Wait," said MacBride.

Cardigan paused at the door.

MacBride picked up the phone, muttered something, listened. Then, "What's that?" His hands knotted around the instrument, his eyes narrowed, his mouth hardened. "Are you sure of that?" He groaned deep in his throat, rocked on his feet. Then, bitterly, "All right!"

He slammed the receiver into the hook and banged the instrument down upon the desk violently. He turned to face Cardigan.

"It's no use, Jack. A runner for that lousy firm of Cohen, Fraser and Cohen, is downstairs, which means this bum slides out of our hands."

Cardigan's face darkened. "How'd they know we had this bird so soon?"

"That's their business. They work on a big retainer from the head of the gang Clark belongs to."

There was a knock at the door, and a sergeant and a patrolman came in. The sergeant showed MacBride a writ, and the patrolman marched Clark out of the office. Then the sergeant left, and MacBride and Cardigan were alone.

"Wires being pulled again," muttered Cardigan. "This guy will never come to trial."

"Of course not," nodded MacBride grimly.

"What a fine state of affairs! We nab a guy, and have every chance to make him come across, and then he's taken out of our hands. What's the use of a Police Department, anyhow?"

"Clark is one of Cavallo's boys. No doubt about it. And we can't do a thing—just sit and curse the whole thing. It's tough to be on the Force eighteen years—and have to stand for it."

"I know, Steve, you can't move. Your wife and kid to think of. But there's one way to get back at these wops, and the only way. They killed Joe, and they've got to pay for it! I'm going to make 'em pay—pound for pound! By God, I am, and the Department and the State's Attorney and everybody else be damned!"

"Jack, you can't—alone. You're a dick and—"

"I'm no longer a dick. I'm single and free and my resignation goes in now! I'm going to fight Cavallo, Steve, at his own game!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I'm resigning from the Department. I'm going on my own and wipe out Cavallo and every one of his dirty gunmen! Richmond City is going to see one of the biggest gang wars in its history! When they killed Joe Hanley, they killed the wrong man, for my part! I'm going to fall on 'em like a ton of brick!"

"Jack, you can't do it!"

"Watch me!" chuckled Cardigan, his eyes glittering.

3

Men said Jack Cardigan was reckless and case-hardened—men meaning cops and reporters and Richmond City's generous sprinkling of gunmen. Something might be added; he was ruthless. As a detective, he'd been hated and feared by more crooks than perhaps any other man in the Department—inspectors, captain, lieutenants and all the rest included. Because he was hard— tough—rough on rats; rats being one of his favorite nicknames applied to a species of human being that shoots in the dark and aims for the back.

For three years Joe Hanley had been his partner, in the Department. In life, they'd been partners for years—and the bond of friendship had been welded firmly and topped off with the marriage of Cardigan's sister Marion to Joe. It was a far, long cry from that happy, flowered day to the day when Marion and Cardigan rode home from the cemetery, after the burial of Joe. Cardigan held his sister in his arms on the slow journey. There was nothing he could say to comfort her. Pity, condolence, make empty, meaningless words on such a tragic day. So he held her in his arms and let her sob.

His own face was a mask, grim and carven, the eyes dark and close-lidded. Home, he put her into the hands of their mother. No one spoke. Glances, gestures, conveyed far more. For a long while he sat alone, motionless and thoughtful. The funeral was over, but the dread pall of it still lingered. Even the house seemed to take on a personality of mourning—quiet and hollow and reverent.

A week later Cardigan sat in a speakeasy on the outer circle of Richmond City's theatrical district. He was sipping a dry Martini when Kennedy of the *Free Press* drifted in and joined him.

"What's the idea of shaking your job, Cardigan?"

"What's that to you?"

"Or were you *told* to resign?"

"Maybe."

Kennedy chuckled. "Sounds more like it. What you get for bringing in Clark. Lord, that was a joke! His lawyer was a sharp egg. Clark played the dope all through. Bet his lawyer spent nights drilling him how to act. Clark was just a hired chauffeur. How did he know the plates were stolen? He was hired a week before the mess out on Webster Road to drive a car. They gave him a car to drive. The whole thing was a joke, and the presenting attorney gave the defense every possible opening. What are you doing now?"

"Nothing. Taking life easy."

"Don't make me laugh!"

"Well, have it your way."

"Listen, Cardigan," said Kennedy. "You know a lot. The *Free Press* would sell its shirt to get some straight dope from you. That's no boloney. I mean it. I've got the whole thing figured out, but what we need is a story where we can omit the 'alleged' crap. Man, you can clean up!"

"Yeah?" Cardigan laughed softly. "Be yourself, Kennedy. Run along. You're wasting time on me."

"I don't know about that."

"Then learn."

Kennedy had a highball and went on his way. Alone, Cardigan took another drink, and looked at his watch. It was half-past eight at night. He looked across at the telephone on the wall. He drained his glass and lit a cigarette.

The telephone rang. He got up and beat the owner to it. "This is for me," he said, and took off the receiver. "You, Pete?… O.K. Be right over."

He hung up, paid for his drinks and shrugged into his dark overcoat. Outside, it was damp and cold, and automobiles hissed by over slushy pavements.

Cardigan did not walk toward the bright glow that marked the beginning of the theatrical district. He bored deeper into the heart of Jockey Street. Where it was dirtiest and darkest, he swung in toward a short flight of broken stone steps, reached a large, ancient door, groped for a bell-button and pressed it. It was opened a moment later by a huge, beetle-browed negro.

"Pete Fink," said Cardigan. "He expects me."

"Who yuh are?" asked the negro.

"None of your damned business."

"I'll get Fink," said the negro and slammed the door in Cardigan's face.

"Takes no chances," muttered Cardigan. "Well, that's good."

Fink opened the door this time, while the negro hovered behind him, his face like shining ebony under the single gas-jet.

"Take a good look, big boy," Cardigan said, as he passed in.

And the negro said, "Got yuh, boss."

Fink led the way up a flight of crooked stairs that creaked under their footfalls. They reached the upper landing. Cardigan placed six doors in a row. One of these Fink opened, and they entered a large, square room, furnished cheaply with odd bits of furniture, no two pieces the same in make or design.

Cardigan stood with his hands in his coat pockets, idly running his eyes about the room.

Fink was leaning against the door he had closed. He was a big, rangy man, with one of his shoulders higher than the other. His nose was a twisted knot; a tawny mustache sagged over his mouth. He had a jaw like a snowplow, and eyes like ice—cold and steady and enigmatic. His hands were big and red and bony. He wore brown corduroy trousers, a blue flannel shirt, a wide belt with an enormous brass buckle. He looked like a tough egg. He wasn't a soft one.

Cardigan sighed and poured himself a drink. He downed it neat, rasped his throat, and looked at the empty glass.

"Good stuff, Pete."

"Cavallo sells the same."

They faced each other. Their eyes met and held and bored one into the other. At last Fink grinned and rocked away from the door, sat down at the table and lit a cigarette. Cardigan sat down opposite him, opened his overcoat and helped himself to one of Fink's cigarettes.

"Well, Pete?…"

Fink leaned forward, elbows resting on the table, his butt jutting from one corner of his mouth and an eye squinted against the smoke that curled upward.

"Six," he said. "I got six."

"Who are they?"

"Chip Slade, Gats Gilman, Luke Kern, Bennie Levy, Chuck Ward and Bat Johnson. All good guns."

"Yeah, I know. How do they feel about it?"

"Cripes, they're ripe!"

"They want to know who's behind you?"

"I said a big guy—somebody big, who's in the know."

Cardigan chuckled. "Remember, Pete, it stays that way. I'm—it sounds like a joke—the mystery man in this. The master mind!" He chuckled again, amusedly, then grew serious. "To come out in the open would be to shoot the whole works. I'm too well known as a gumshoe. But I'll manage this, Pete, and supply the first funds. I've got a measly two thousand saved up, but it's a starter. And I'm out to flop on the bums that got Hanley, my buddy. If everybody holds up his end, you'll all make money and Cavallo and his crowd will get washed out."

"You say the word, Jack. I'm takin' orders from you. The rest take orders from me and no questions asked."

"Good. I'll give you five hundred bucks to buy a second-hand car. Get a big touring. To hell with the looks of it; buy it for the motor—for speed. Buy half-a-dozen high-powered rifles and plenty of ammunition. Pick up some grenades if you can. How about a storehouse?"

"Got one picked—an old farmhouse out on Farmingville Turnpike."

"Sounds good. Rent it for a month."

"It's way out in the sticks," added Fink. "Off the main pike, way in on a lane, and no other house inside of a quarter mile. I can get it for fifty bucks a month."

"Get it. We've got to watch out for tapped wires, though. Here, I'm staying at the Adler House. You know that number. If things get hot and you've got to talk a lot, just call me up and say, 'I've got something to tell you.' I'll hang up and run down to the drug-store on the corner. There's a booth there and I'll get you the number. We'll choose booths all over the city where we can make calls, and we'll get the numbers."

"O.K."

"How about the dinge downstairs?"

"He owns a dump. Sees a lot and says nothin'."

Cardigan ground out his cigarette. "Then it's all set. Get me straight, Fink. Leave the cops alone. Tell your boys that. We're after Cavallo and his rats—not the cops. If the cops show up, run. I've got a grudge against that wop and the crowd he runs with. I'm playing my grudge to a showdown. If I make some jack out of it, all right. But I'm after rats first—not jack. You and your guns can clean up sweet in this racket, if you use your head and move how I tell you."

"I got you, Jack," nodded Fink.

"All right. Let me know when you're all set and I'll map out our first move. Get the rifles, ammunition, grenades. Get a fast car and see that the tires are good." He drew a wad of bills from his pocket. "There's a thousand as a starter."

Fink shoved the money into his pocket and poured another brace of drinks.

"You got guts, Jack," he said, "to chuck the Department—for this."

"Guts, my eye!" clipped Cardigan. "I've got a grudge, Pete, a whale of a grudge—against the dirty, rotten bums that killed the best friend I ever had." He raised his glass. "Down the hatch."

On that they drank.

4

Two days later Cardigan was sitting in his room at the Adler House, when the telephone rang. It was the desk, and he said, "Send him up." Then he settled back again in his over-stuffed easy-chair. It was ten in the morning and he was still in pajamas and bathrobe. On a settee beside him was a detailed map of Richmond City and its suburbs. Here and there he had marked x's, or made penciled notations.

There was a knock on the door and he called, "Come in, Steve."

MacBride came in, closed the door and stood there stroking his chin and regarding Cardigan seriously.

"Sit down," said Cardigan. "Take the load off your feet, Steve. You'll find cigars in the box on the table. How's tricks?"

MacBride took a cigar and eased himself down on a divan. "My day off and I thought I'd drop in and see you."

"Is that all you came for, Steve?"

MacBride lit up and took a couple of puffs before replying. "Not exactly, Jack."

"Spill it."

"Oh, it's not much. Only I was worrying. You still thinking of butting in on Cavallo's racket?"

"What a question! Why'd you suppose I left the Department?"

"M-m-m," droned MacBride. "I wish you hadn't, Jack. You were the best man I had, and, Jack, old boy, you can't buck that crowd. It's madness. You'll get in trouble, and if you make a bad step, you'll get the Department on your neck. You haven't got politics behind you. You'd be out of luck. That's straight. How do you think I'd feel if it came to the point where you faced me as a prisoner?"

"I've been thinking about that, Steve," admitted Cardigan. "It's the one thing I'd hate."

"No more than I would." MacBride licked a loose wrapper back into place on his cigar. "Kennedy's been in to see me again. That guy's so nosey and so clever it hurts. Look out for him. *He's* got an idea you're up to something."

"I know. That bird's so sharp he's going to cut himself some day."

"Made any moves yet—I mean, you?"

"Some—getting things ready."

"What's up your sleeve anyway?"

"Steve—" Cardigan paused the flex his lips. "Steve, we've been mighty good friends. We are yet. But I can't tell you. I'm playing a game that can't have any air-holes. You understand?"

MacBride nodded. "I guess so. But I'm worrying, Jack. I've got a hunch you're going to get in wrong and somebody's going to nail you."

"Don't worry. Forget it. If I pull a bone I'll take the consequence. But I'm not counting on pulling a bone. This town is going to shake. Somebody's going to get hurt, and, Steve, before long some pretty high departmental offices are liable to be vacated so damned fast—"

"I'd go easy, Jack."

"I am—feeling my way."

MacBride shrugged and got up. They shook, and the captain went out, a little mournfully and reluctantly.

Ten minutes later the phone rang and Fink asked, "How soon can you come out?"

"Five minutes."

"I'll pick you up at Main and Anderson in the car."

Cardigan hung up and snapped into his clothes. Five minutes later he shot down in the elevator, strode through the lobby and out on to Main Street. Two blocks south was Anderson. He saw the big touring car idling along—the one that Fink had bought for five-fifty; five years old, but it could do seventy-five an hour. The curtains were on, all of them.

The door opened and he hopped in, settled down beside Fink. They pounded down Main Street, swung into a side street to avoid a traffic stop, and cut north until they struck Farmingville Turnpike.

Then Cardigan said, "Well?"

"I got the rifles and ammunition and some grenades," said Fink. "I want to show you the farmhouse. The boys are ripe to go, soon as you say the word."

It took them half an hour to reach the ramshackle farmhouse. It was quite some distance from the hub of the city. It stood well off the main highway, hidden behind an arm of woods and reached by a narrow lane where the snow still lay. Fink pulled up into the yard and they got out. He had keys and opened the kitchen door. They entered and Cardigan looked it over. Two big rooms and a kitchen downstairs. Three bedrooms upstairs. Dust, the dust of long neglect, covered the floor. The windows were small and set with many little squares of glass. The place was old, years old. The walls were lined with brick, a relic of days when houses were built to last for more than one generation.

"Just the thing," nodded Cardigan. "Maybe we'll use it tonight."

"Huh?"

"Tonight. Cavallo keeps a lot of his booze on North Street. Know the old milk stables?"

"Yeah."

"That's the place. There are three in a row, all joined together. The one in the middle is our meat. It has sliding doors, and there's always a reserve truck inside."

"How do you know all this, Jack?"

"What do you suppose the Department does, sleep all the time?"

"Oh… I gotcha. Yeah, sure."

"Get your map out."

Fink dived into his pocket, came out with a folder that opened to large dimensions. Cardigan also had his out.

"I've figured out the route you're to take," he said. "Mark these down now, so there'll be no slip up. The truck is a type

governed to do thirty-five per and no more. Four speeds ahead. All right." And he proceeded to give Fink precise directions to follow, street by street to Black Hill Road which leads into Farmingville Turn-pike. "Got the route all marked?" he asked, as he finished.

"Yeah, all marked."

"Who'll drive the truck?"

"Bat Johnson and—"

"No—Bat's enough. The rest of you drift along ahead in the touring car and lead the way. One man on a truck 'll cause no suspicion. More might. And get this. Maple Road runs parallel with North Street—behind the stables. You park on Maple Road and watch across the lots till you see three blinks from a flashlight. That will mean to come on and take things over. When Bat takes the truck out you boys beat it back across the lots, into the car and fall in ahead of the truck on Avenue C."

"Who's goin' to blink the lights?"

"I am."

"Huh?" Fink seemed incredulous.

"That's what I said. I'm going ahead to see if the road's clear. I'll take care of the watchman. If there's more there—the gang, I mean—we'll give up for the night. And mind this, if you don't see any flashes by ten o'clock, breeze. Be on Maple Road at exactly nine fifty, no sooner or later. If everything turns out all right, if you get the booze out to the farmhouse and away safe, call me up and just say, 'Jake'; that's all. And about the truck. Drive it back and abandon it on Black Hill Road."

"But, hell, Jack, why can't me and the boys bust in the stables and crash the place proper?"

"You would say that, Pete. That's just the way to ball up the whole works. We're not out to butcher our way if we can help it. That's the trouble with you guys. You don't use your head. That's the main reason why Cavallo and his rats are going to blow up. They're too damned free with their gats."

"Um—I guess you're right there, Jack."

"All right, then. Come on, let's breeze. Drive me to the bus line and drop me off."

An hour later Cardigan was eating lunch at his favorite haunt in Jockey Street, with a bottle of Sauterne on the side. It was one of fifteen restaurants circulated throughout the city and owned by a syndicate of brokers that paid a fat sum monthly to the authorities for the privilege. Four were in the financial district, six in the theatrical district, the rest scattered. More would open for business in time. You didn't need a card. The places were wide, wide open. Where the syndicate got the liquor, was nobody's business.

The Jockey Street place was managed by an ex-saloon keeper named Maloney. Cardigan had been a frequent visitor there since his resignation from the force, and they got on well. This day he called Maloney over and asked him to sit down.

He asked, "Between you and me, what does your outfit pay for good Scotch?"

"That's our business, buddy, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean. Come on, I'm *talking* business."

"You in the game?"

"I know somebody who is."

Maloney thought hard. "Sixty-five bucks a case."

Cardigan nodded. “You can get it for fifty-five. Work the deal with your boss and you’ll get a rake-off of five bucks on the case.”

“Your friend must be hard up.”

“He’s just starting in business.”

“Oh. We’ll have to sample it first.”

“Sure. But are you on?”

“It sounds good. How—how many cases?”

“Maybe two hundred.”

“Cripes!”

“Think it over. Speak to your boss. I’ll see you again in a day or so.”

He left ten minutes later, pretty certain that he had paved the way nicely. To kill the afternoon, he dropped in at a vaudeville theatre, and ate dinner at the hotel. Later he sat in his room smoking a cigar and going over his plan step by step, searching for a loop-hole. He couldn’t see any. Tonight would start the ball rolling. His vengeance would be under way. They’d murdered Joe Hanley. Now they’d pay—pound for pound. It was law of his own making, a hard, raw law—fighting rats on their own ground with their own tactics. Yet he had one advantage; a reasoning, calculating mind, thanks to his service in the Department; strategy first, guns—if it should come to that means—later.

He had a hard crew under him. Pete Fink, a product of the bootleg age—one time in the prize ring, once a sailor. Cardigan knew that he was a tough customer, and he also knew that he could rely on him. The other guns; he relied on Fink to take care of them. He’d arrested Bat Johnson only a year ago for petty larceny. Chip Slade had once felt the rap of his blackjack.

“Hell,” he mused, “if they only knew who was behind Fink!”

5

Eight-thirty came around. Cardigan put on his overcoat and shoved an automatic into his pocket. He took his time. He wandered leisurely out of the hotel, walked a couple of blocks down Main Street and boarded a bus bound for the suburbs. Half an hour later he got off, lit a cigarette and strolled north. He was a little ahead of time, so he went on at ease.

He reached Maple Road, and continued south. Houses were scattered, and fields intervened. Then, squatting dimly in the murk beyond a field of tall grass, the old milk stables, Cardigan paused behind an ancient oak tree and looked at the illuminated dial of his watch. It was nine-thirty-five. His hand slid into his pocket and gripped the butt of his automatic.

He slipped away from the tree, hunched over and weaved his way through tall weeds. His feet slushed through snow. At intervals he paused briefly, to listen. Then he went on, bit by bit, until he reached the old picket fence behind the stables. In this he found a gap and muscled through, and squatted still for a long moment.

From his coat he drew a dark handkerchief and fastened it about his face, just below his eyes. His hat brim he pulled lower.

There was a faint yellow glow shining from a window, and toward this Cardigan crept. A shade had been drawn down to within an inch or two of the bottom of the window. Smoke was drifting from a tin stove chimney. In a moment Cardigan was crouched by the window.

He saw two men sitting in chairs by a little stove. On the stove a kettle was spouting

steam. A lantern stood on an empty box nearby. One of the men was asleep. The other was halfheartedly reading a newspaper; Cardigan recognized him, a huge brute of a man called "Dutch" Weber, with a record. The other he placed as Jakie Hart, sometimes called the Creole Kid, a one-time New Orleans wharf rat. A dirty pair, he mused.

Minutes were flying, and so much depended on chance. Cardigan bent down and felt around on the snow. He found a two-foot length of board, and hefted it in his left hand. His right hand still gripped the automatic. Again looking in, he raised the board, set his jaw and crashed the window. The shade snapped up. The man with the paper spun in his chair, clawed at his gun.

But Cardigan had him covered, his head and shoulders thrust through the window.

"Drop that gat, Dutch!" he barked. "You too, Jakie—drop it! Fast, you guys, or you'll get lead in your pants!"

The Creole Kid blinked bleary eyes. Dutch Weber cursed under his breath, his huge face flushing, murder in his gimlet eyes, his big hands writhing. But he dropped his gun, and the Creole Kid imitated him a moment later.

"Stand up—both of you," went on Cardigan. "Face the wall! Move out of turn and God help you!"

"You lousy bum!" snarled Weber.

"Can that crap, buddy! About face!" bit off Cardigan.

Sullenly they faced the wall, hands raised.

A moment later Cardigan was in the room. He yanked down the shade, picked up the men's discarded guns, thrust them into his pocket. And from his pocket he drew two pairs of manacles.

"Back up six paces, Dutch! Stay where you are, Jakie! Never mind looking, Dutch—just back up. Now put your hands behind your back. Don't get funny, either." In a flash he had the manacles on Weber. "Get over against the wall again. Move!" He jabbed the muzzle of his gun in Weber's back. "Now you, Jakie—back up!"

In a moment he had the other pair of bracelets on the Creole Kid, and forced him back against the wall. Then he took a small bottle of chloroform from his pocket and saturated a handkerchief.

"Back up again, Jakie! As you are, Dutch!"

He clamped his arm around the Creole Kid's neck, forced the handkerchief against his nostrils and into his mouth, held it there, while he still warned Weber to stay where he was. Presently the Creole Kid went limp, relaxed, and Cardigan let him fall to the floor, unconscious.

Then he soaked another handkerchief, approached Weber and planted his gun in the big man's ribs.

"Not a stir, big boy!"

His left hand shot out, smacked the saturated handkerchief against Weber's mouth. The big man struggled, but Cardigan reminded him of the gun.

"Damn your soul!" snarled Weber in muffled tones.

"Shut your trap!"

In a short time Weber joined the Creole Kid on the floor, muttering vaguely, his hands twitching slower and slower. Cardigan pocketed his gun, produced a coil of thin, strong wire and bound their ankles. Then he ripped away strips

of their shirts and bound the handkerchiefs securely in their mouths. From Weber's pockets he took a ring of keys.

With his flashlight he started a quick, systematic search of the stables. The large, covered truck was in the main stable. Its tank registered seven gallons of gasoline. Under tarpaulins he saw case upon case of liquor—between two and three hundred. He also saw ten barrels of wine. These he tipped over and sprung the spigots, and the wine gurgled and flowed on the dirt floor.

Chuckling, he hurried into the back room, blew out the lantern and pulled up the shade on the window. He raised his flashlight and blinked it three times. Then he opened the back door, sped into the main stable and unlocked the big sliding doors, but did not open them.

He turned, jumped to a ladder and climbed up to a small loft, drew the ladder up after him. Then he lay flat on his stomach in the pitch gloom, waited and listened. After a few-moments he heard a door creak, and then footsteps—saw the reflection of a flashlight in the back room.

"Huh," muttered a voice, "the Chief sure paved the way. Lookit the way them two babies is tied up!"

"Shut up, Bat. Come on, gang." That was Fink.

The beam of light jumped into the stable. Figures loomed in. The flash settled on the draining barrels. Someone chuckled.

"What he can't take he busts," said a voice. "This Chief knows his termaters, what I mean!"

The beam of light swept around the stable and found the stacked cases of liquor.

"*Ba-by*!" exclaimed someone, softly.

"Cut the gab!" hissed Fink. "Step to it! There's the truck! Come on, guys!"

Cardigan watched them spread out. They hauled off the tarpaulins. Two men jumped into the truck. The others leaped to the cases of liquor. They worked swiftly and for the most part silently, passing the cases to the pair in the truck, who stacked them rapidly.

One muttered. "Y'know, first off I thought this Chief was just a guy wit' brains an' no guts.

I mean, like he wanted us to do his dirty work—"

"Pipe down, Gats!" snapped Fink. "Y'see he's got guts, don't you now?"

"Sure. I'm all for him."

"You better be," muttered Fink. "Any one o' you guys that thinks he's ain't's got a lot to learn."

"Where's he now?"

"None o' your business!" said Fink. "Prob'ly ridin' home in a bus or somethin'. Nemmine the talk. Step on it."

Cardigan smiled in the darkness. Yes, he could trust Fink; no doubt of it, now. Not even Fink knew he was up there in the loft, a silent watcher.

The minutes dragged by. Case after case went into the truck. The pile on the floor grew smaller and smaller. The men worked rapidly, and now silently. Cardigan looked at his watch. Half-past ten. He was stiff from holding his tense position.

"Cripes, what a load!" a voice said hoarsely.

"How many more?"

"Ten."

"That," said Fink, "'ll make two-hundred-and-forty-two."

"Ba-by!"

Cardigan saw the last case go in. Then Fink and two others spread tarpaulins over the rear and lashed them to the sides.

"All right, Bat," he said.

Bat Johnson climbed up into the seat, juggled the transmission lever. Another man grabbed the crank, heaved on it. The motor spat, barked, and then pounded regularly. Two men jumped to the doors, slid them back. They looked out, came back in and one said, "Clear! Let her go!"

Bat shoved into gear and the big truck rumbled out. The doors were pulled shut. The men bunched together and at a word from Fink slipped out through the back door.

Three minutes later Cardigan dropped from the loft. He strode into the back room, snapped on his flash, played its beam on the

Creole Kid and Dutch Weber, still unconscious. Then he dropped their keys and guns beside them, snapped off his flash and made for the door.

With a brittle little chuckle he went out, crossed the fields and struck Maple Road. He sought the bus line by a different route than the one by which he had reached the stables. At a quarter to twelve he entered his room, took off his coat and dropped into an easy-chair. He lit a cigar and relaxed, a little weary after the strenuous night.

But deep within him there was a great calm. He thought of Joe, and of his widowed sister. He thought, too, of other cops who had met death in strange back-alleys at the hands of rats who always shot from the rear. What protection was a shield nowadays? Protection! He grimaced. More a target! But mainly it was Joe he thought of—mild-mannered, easy-going Joe. Joe with two bullets in him, out on Webster Road…

At half-past one the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Jake," said Fink.

"Jake," said Cardigan, and hung up.

6

It did not get into the papers. Things like this don't. But the underworld rumbled ominously, and the echoes seeped into the Department, but got no further. The law-abiding element of Richmond City went about its daily tasks and pleasures as usual, all ignorant of the fact that in the world of shadows, wolves were growing and baring hungry fangs.

The very next afternoon MacBride dropped in to see Cardigan.

"Well, Jack," he said.

And Cardigan said, "Well?"

"M-m-m, you did it."

"You mean Cavallo?"

MacBride nodded.

Cardigan chuckled.

"We got a whiff of it this morning," went on MacBride. "Cavallo must have gone to his brother-in-law Diorio and I guess Diorio went to his friend Alderman Pozzo and then Pozzo had a chat with State's Attorney Mulroy. Jack, for God's sake, watch your step!"

"I am. Why, do they suspect?"

"No, but—" MacBride clenched his fists and gritted his teeth. "I shouldn't be telling you this, Jack. But—we're—old friends, and I'd like to see that dago wiped out. And I guess—if I was younger and single—and a buddy of mine—like Joe was to you—was bumped off, I'd do the same. Maybe I wouldn't. Maybe I wouldn't have the guts. But, Jack, I've got to tell you, for old times' sake. McGinley and Kline, of the State's Attorney's office, have been detailed to get the guys who flopped on Cavallo's parade!"

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. For my sake, Jack, shake this racket. You can't beat it. You see what you've got against you?"

Cardigan nodded. "I know, Steve. But I've started, and I'm not going to let the thing just hang in the air. The more I think of Cavallo and Bert Geer and Monkey Burns and all that crowd, the more I want to blow up their racket. Imagine Pozzo for Alderman—a guy that can hardly speak English and calls himself a one hundred per cent American! Cavallo's bulwark! Mulroy having to take these wops' part because they put him in office, and getting a rake-off from their proceeds."

"I know, Jack, I know. But—"

"No, sir, Steve. I'm playing this to a showdown, and somebody's going to get hurt in the wind-up."

"It might be you, Jack."

"Here's hoping it won't."

"No one gets anywhere today trying to be a martyr."

Cardigan laughed shortly. "Martyr! You think *I'm* taking the godly role of a martyr? Hell, no! I'm just an ordinary guy who's sore as a boil. I'm a guy whose buddy got a dirty break, and I'm starting to go after these lads the only way they can be reached."

MacBride shrugged and remained silent. Then he got up, shook Cardigan's hand and went out.

A little later the phone rang and Fink said, "I got somethin' to tell you."

"All right," replied Cardigan briskly.

A few minutes later he walked into a drugstore on the corner, stepped into the booth and closed the door. A minute, and the bell rang.

"O.K., Pete," he said.

Fink explained. "Meet me in the dump on Jockey Street in half an hour. I've got a sample, and it's sure powerful stuff. I'll be waitin' outside the door there. Everything is jake, and the boys are feelin' good but wonderin' about their divvy."

"Be over," said Cardigan.

When, later, he strolled down Jockey Street, he saw Fink cross the street, pause on the steps of their rendezvous, look his way, and then pass inside. Cardigan swung up the steps and the door opened. He went in and Fink led the way up to the latter's room. The big man drew a pink flask from his pocket.

"They're all in pints," he explained. "Try it."

Cardigan took a pull on the bottle and let the liquor burn in. “Good,” he nodded. “The best I’ve tasted.”

Fink grinned. “If that stuff ain’t come across the pond I don’t know Scotch. It’s the first time I ain’t drunk dish water in a long time. D’ you figger Cavallo’s sore?”

“Sore!” echoed Cardigan, and laughed on it.

“Yeah,” droned Fink, “I guess he’d lookin’ to kill. Um. Now the stuff’s out there in the farmhouse, what?”

“I’ll know by tonight. Keep your shirt on.”

“I ain’t worryin’. The gang. They’re achin’ to see some jack and have a good time.”

“You tell ‘em to watch their step, Pete. It’s hard lines for any guy pulls a bone. We’re not through yet. It would be just like Chip Slade, for instance, to doll up in new duds, pick up a broad, get tight to the eyes and blabber. We’ve got to watch out for that, Pete.”

“Yeah, I know, Jack. I been keepin’ my eye on Chip.”

“I’ll see you here tonight, Pete.”

Cardigan went out with the pint flask on his hip and dropped in to see Maloney in the speakeasy. He talked business to him, and let him take a drink from the bottle.

“Boy!” whistled Maloney. “That’s *Scotch*, what I mean!”

“What’s the news?”

“The boss says all right, if he likes the stuff. Fifty-five a case.”

“I can get two-hundred-and-forty cases. He can have the lot or none, and he’s got to act fast. This is no young stuff—”

“Hell, I know! Ain’t I just tasted it? And me—I get my share, when?”

“When your boss pays, you get twelve-hundred bucks, and then forget about everything. There are no names necessary.”

“Of course not,” nodded Maloney. “How do you get the money?”

“Your boss’ll send it to John D. Brown, at a post office box. You’ll get the box number later. Send it in a plain package, with no return address. Thirteen thousand and two hundred dollars in one hundred dollar bills.”

“Insure it?”

“Lord no! Just first class—that’s the safest way to send stuff through the mails. It beats registered mail four ways from the jack. I never lost a first class letter, but I’ve lost ‘em registered and I’ve lost insured packages. A man will pick up the letter at the post office.” He thought for a moment. “Get the dope from your boss, and let’s know where the booze goes.”

“I ought to get my share first,” demurred Maloney.

“I know. You think I’ll skip. You’ll get yours through the mail, too. That’s the proposition. It’s up to you.”

“I’ll take the chance.” Maloney got up. “Come in at six.”

Cardigan nodded and left. He took a box at a suburban post office under the name of John D. Brown. When he met Maloney at six that night the ex-saloon keeper was flushed with elation. Everything was settled, and the liquor was to be delivered as soon as possible.

"That means tonight," put in Cardigan.

"The boss stores it at the Tumbledown Inn. Say the word and there'll be somebody there tonight to meet the truck."

"It'll be delivered sometime after midnight."

With that Cardigan went out and met Fink in the latter's hideout. He explained what had transpired, and Fink rubbed his hands in joyful anticipation.

"I know where I can get a truck, Jack. Leave it to me."

"I am," said Cardigan.

He explained in detail how the liquor should be transported, how Bat Johnson should drive the truck alone and the others ride in the touring car ahead. The Tumbledown Inn was on Farmingville Turnpike, four miles beyond the farmhouse where the liquor was stored at present.

"It's a cinch," said Fink.

"When it's all over, ring me up and say the O.K. word."

They parted, and Cardigan headed for the Adler House. He had proved a successful general on his first try. He believed he could repeat a second time, and then some more. He turned in at eight and set his alarm to wake him at one. He figured that he should get a report from Fink at about two.

When he got up at one a.m., he dressed, in the event of an emergency. He drank some hot black coffee from a thermos and ate some sandwiches which he had brought up before. Then he lounged on a divan with a cigar and watched the clock. The hands moved around the hour and passed two. They passed two-thirty and wheeled on toward three. At three, Cardigan sat up.

He looked grave, a bit tight-lipped. He stared at the telephone. It was black and silent. The hotel was silent as a tomb. Up from the street floated the sound of a lone trolley car rattling across a switch. He sat down, clasping his hands around one knee, tapping an impatient foot. Half-past three.

"Something's gone wrong," he muttered. He cracked fist into palm, cursed under his breath, bitterly.

Dawn came, and then the sun. And still no word from Pete Fink.

Cardigan put on his overcoat and went out. He bought a paper, thinking he might find some clue there, but he reasoned that if anything had happened in the early hours, the morning papers wouldn't have it yet. The next edition might. He ate breakfast in a dairy restaurant. Then, reasoning that he ought to be at his room in case Fink might call, he hurried back.

At nine Fink called. He said two words. "My room."

"Right," said Cardigan.

7

Twenty minutes later he was striding down Jockey Street. The negro let him in and he climbed the rickety staircase. He knocked at Fink's door. There was a slow movement.

Then, "You, Jack?"

"Yes, Pete."

The door opened. Cardigan went in.

Fink was dropping back into a chair.

"Lock it," he muttered.

His face was haggard. His left arm was in a sling, and blotches of dry blood showed on the bandage.

"I thought so," said Cardigan.

"Yeah," nodded Fink, and forced a grin. "They got Bat."

Cardigan sat down. "Go on."

"They got Bat. It was all a accident. We delivered the booze and was on the way back. We took Prairie Boulevard. Bat wanted to bring back the truck. The tourin' car got a flat and we stopped to make a change. Bat went ahead slow all by his merry lonesome. We got the spare on, all right, and whooped it up to catch him. You know where Prairie Boulevard goes through them deep woods. It's pretty lonely there.

"Well, our headlights pick up Bat and he's stalled. But we see another car stopped in front of him, facing him. It looks phony, and we take it easy. We see some guys standin' around on the road, but they duck for the car. We stop our car and wait. We think maybe they're dicks, see. Then their car starts and roars towards us. It looks like they're goin' to crash us, but they cut around and slam by, scrapin' our mudguard. A lot of guns bust loose and I'm socked in the arm. Chip gets his cheek opened. Nobody else is hurt. Gats turns around and empties his rod at the back of it. I don't know who he hit, but the car kept goin'.

"I get out, holdin' my arm and Bennie tears off some of his shirt and sops up the blood. Chip is holdin' his cheek and cursin' a blue streak. Gats runs up to the truck and we go after him. Bat is layin' on the road, pretty still. Him and Gats were buddies, you know. You should hear Gats curse!

"Bat is dyin'. They'd busted his knob with a blackjack. He says he was ridin' along when this car stopped him. See, just by accident. Monkey Burns and Bert Geer and two others. They smell there was booze in the truck, and ask him what's he been doin'. He tells them where they can go. They wanter know who he's been runnin' booze for. He ain't talkin'. They sock him, but he don't chirp. That's Bat all over. More you sock him the worse stubborn he gets. Gawd, they batted hell outta him! Ugh! Then they see us. Bat croaks after he spiels us his story. Poor Bat. He was a good shuffer."

Cardigan stared at the floor for a long minute, his hands clenched.

Fink was saying, "I took the plates off the truck and disfiggered the engine number and the serial number with a couple o' shots. Then we drove to the farmhouse. The boys are there now. I got here alone, quick as I could. I could ha' sent one o' the boys to call you up, but I didn't want any o' 'em to know where you was."

"You're aces up in a pinch, Pete," said Cardigan, and he meant it.

"I did the best I could."

"I'll say you did. Did Monkey and his gang see you boys?"

"No. And Bat didn't tell 'em. But they know, like everybody else, that Bat was buddies with Gats, and they'll be huntin' Gats. And Gats has gone wild. He wants to go out gunnin' for them guys. He swears he'll do it. And Gats is the best damn gunman I know about."

"You've got to keep him under cover."

"Yeah. I got to get back to the farmhouse. Bandage this arm tight so I can put it in a sleeve. I can't go walkin' around too

much with a sling. It'll hurt without it, but what the hell."

"Good man, Pete. Get out there, see how things are. I'll hang around the corner drugstore between two and three. Call me there from a booth and give me a line."

When he had bandaged Fink's arm, he patted the big man on the back and left him. Below, in the street, he ran into Kennedy, of the *Free Press*, leaning indolently against a lamp-post. He brought up short, his breath almost taken away.

"Hello, Cardigan," said the reporter in his tired way. "What's the attraction?"

"You trying to crack wise, Kennedy?"

"Who, me? No-o, not me, Cardigan. See this yet?" He handed Cardigan the latest edition of the *Free Press*.

RIVAL BOOTLEG GANGS CLASH

That was the headline. Something about an abandoned truck, empty, with license plates gone and engine number disfigured. Blood on the road. Empty cartridges. Nearby trees showing bullet marks. A farmer beyond the woods had heard the shooting about half-past one a.m.

No cops on the job. The farmer himself had come out to investigate and reported the abandoned truck. It looked like the beginning of a gang feud.

Cardigan looked up. "Well that's news, Kennedy."

"Is it?" Kennedy had a tantalizing way of smiling.

"I'm in a hurry," said Cardigan, and started off.

Kennedy fell into step beside him. "I'm not green, Cardigan. You ought to know that by this time. And I know that one of the gangs was Cavallo's. Now the other gang… Cardigan, be a sport."

"What do you mean?"

"Tell me about it."

"You're all wet, Kennedy."

"Oh, no I'm not. Listen, Cardigan. You're not pulling the wool over this baby's eyes. The Department knows who the guy was that was bumped off and then carried away by his buddies. They got the dope from Cavallo's friends—maybe Diorio to Pozzo to Mulroy. Then they tell the Department to get busy— just like that, and they're spreading for somebody. That riot squad's on pins and needles, waiting for another break. Now, it would take guts to head a gang to buck that outfit—you tell me, Cardigan."

Cardigan laughed. "Kennedy, you're funny. So long." He crossed the street and left Kennedy in perplexed indecision.

But he realized that Kennedy was one man he'd have to look out for. That news hound, in other words, knew his onions. He was nobody's fool.

After luncheon Cardigan went out to the suburban post office, opened his box and took out a solitary package. He thrust it into his pocket and returned to his hotel. There he opened it, and found thirteen thousand, two hundred dollars. Twelve hundred he put in a plain envelope and addressed it to Maloney. In each of five plain envelopes he placed a thousand dollars, for Pete Fink's boys. For Pete he placed aside two thousand. He lost no time in mailing Maloney's letter.

Later, he was at the booth in the corner drugstore to get Fink's prearranged call. Fink

mentioned his room, but Cardigan objected, remembering Kennedy, and told Fink to pick him up at a street corner well out, of the city. Then he hung up and took a bus out, got off at the street he had named, and waited for Fink. He did not have to wait long. The touring car came up, and Fink was driving with his one good arm. Cardigan got in and they rolled off.

"Gats," said Fink. "He slipped out on the boys. He's out gunnin' for the guys who got Bat Johnson."

"What!"

"Yup."

Cardigan saw his nicely made plans toppling to ruin. This was one of those things the best of tacticians cannot foresee. An accident. A bad break. Gats gone gun-mad because his buddy'd been killed by the wops.

"We've got to get him," he said.

"Yeah, but where?"

Cardigan cursed the luck. Then he said, "Well, I've got the money. It's all here. A thousand each for the boys. Two thousand for you. Twelve hundred went to the go-between for the booze." He passed over the envelopes. "That'll make the boys feel better." After a moment he said, "The riot squad's ready for action."

"It won't take long, if we don't get Gats. He'll start the fireworks sure as hell."

"Drop me off when the next bus comes along. Look for Gats. Go to all the places you think he'd be. Ring me at the hotel and say 'Jake' if you get him. Then stay out at the farm—all of you— until this blows over."

A few minutes later he got out of the car, boarded a bus and went back to his hotel. He was very much on edge, and he mused that no matter how perfectly you lay a plan, something is liable to happen that will bring down the whole framework.

At four o'clock the telephone rang, and Fink said, "Jake."

"Jake," said Cardigan.

A great burden was automatically lifted from his mind. He even whistled as he got into his bath. He hummed while he shaved. Then he dressed, spent half an hour with a cigar and the evening paper, and at five-thirty put on his overcoat and went out. As he swung out of the hotel, he heard the scream of a siren. He looked up the street.

Three police cars were roaring down Main Street. Traffic scattered. People gathered on the curb. The three cars shot by the hotel doing fifty miles an hour. They were packed with policemen, and automatic rifles were clamped on the sides. The sirens snarled madly.

Cardigan's breath stuck in his throat. A chill danced up and down his spine. Then his jaw set and he crossed to a taxicab.

"Hit Farmingville Turnpike," he clipped, and jumped in.

He started to close the door, but something held it. He turned around. Kennedy was climbing in after him.

"Mind if I go?"

Cardigan sank into his seat, his fists clenched. But he managed to grin. "Sure. The old gumshoe instinct in me always follows a riot call. I'm anxious to see what this is all about."

"Yeah?" smiled Kennedy.

"Yeah. I'm in the dark, just like you."

Kennedy frowned after the manner of a man who wondered if after all he isn't wrong in what he'd been supposing.

8

Cardigan had a hard time masking his inner emotions. He said to the chauffeur, "Follow those police cars. It's all right. We're reporters."

Kennedy lit a cigarette. "You've got me guessing, Cardigan."

"Me? Same here, Kennedy. You've got me guessing, too."

"Have a butt."

"Thanks." It was casual, everything he said, but inside of him there was turmoil. What was going on? What had happened to Fink and the boys? He'd formed a strange liking for Pete Fink. In his own way Pete had proved his fidelity, his worth.

The sirens went on screaming. People were still looking out of windows when the taxi shot past in the wake of the police cars. Pedestrians had gathered on street corners and were speculating. Some were talking to traffic cops, asking questions. The cops only grinned and shrugged and waved them away. Other cars were joining in the impromptu parade, breaking all speed laws. The people had been reading of a fresh outbreak in gangdom, of a bitter gang feud. They were obsessed now, rushing to get a bird's-eye view, for human nature is fundamentally melodramatic and its curiosity very close to the morbid.

It was already dark, in the early winter gloom. The taxi struck Farmingville Turnpike, fell into the stream of vehicles that pounded along. Horns tooted, and big, high-powered cars shot by so fast that the taxi seemed to be standing still. Mob curiosity was at its peak. Anything draws it—a fire, an accident, a soap-box orator, a brawl between school-boys, a man painting a flag-pole.

Then suddenly the cars began parking. In the gleam of the headlights two policemen with drawn nightsticks were shouting hoarsely, waving the people away.

"I guess we get out here," said Kennedy.

"Looks that way."

"Come on."

Cardigan paid the fare and they walked ahead. Kennedy showed his card and Cardigan went through with him. They strode briskly along the edge of the woods.

"Hear it?" asked Kennedy.

Cardigan heard it—the rattle of gun fire. Yes, the farmhouse. Alternate waves of heat and cold passed over him. The shadows in the woods were pitch black. Soon they could see the flash of guns, hear the brittle hammering of a machine-gun, firing in spasmodic bursts.

A figure in plainclothes loomed before them.

"Hello, Mac," said Kennedy.

"Who's your friend?" muttered the captain.

"Cardigan."

"Oh-o!"

Kennedy pushed on. Cardigan stopped and MacBride came closer.

"Well, Jack, you see?"

Cardigan bit his lip. “What are you doing, blowing the place up?”

“Yes. Captain McGurk in charge.”

“How’d it start?”

“Headquarters got a phone call about a lot of shooting going on out here.”

Cardigan growled. “Can’t you get ‘em to offer a truce? God, Steve, it’s pure slaughter!”

He was thinking of Pete Fink and the other boys, trapped in the house.

“There’s no use. We came up in the bushes and let go with a machine-gun as a warning. A lot of rifle fire was our answer. This looks like the end.”

“Cripes, Steve, stop it—stop it!” He lunged ahead.

MacBride grabbed him, held him in a grip of steel.

“Easy, Jack. You can’t do a thing. Don’t be a fool. You took the chance and this is the result.”

“Let me go, Steve—let go!”

“No, dammit—no! By God, if you make a move I’ll crack you over the head!”

“You will, will you?”

“So help me!”

Cardigan swore and heaved in MacBride’s grasp. They struggled, weaving about, silent and grim. They crashed deeper into the bushes. Then MacBride struck, and Cardigan groaned and slumped down.

MacBride knelt beside him, white-faced and panting. “Jack, old boy, you hurt much? I didn’t mean to hit so hard… Jack, but you can’t do a thing. It’s the breaks of the racket. God!…” He was rubbing Cardigan’s head.

The battle was still on. Daggers of flame slashed through the dark. Lead drummed against the walls of the house, shattered the windows, pumped into the rooms. Spurts of flame darted from the house. A policeman crumpled. Another heaved up, clutching at his chest, and screamed.

“Oh, God!” groaned MacBride.

Captain McGurk, in charge, swore bitterly. He looked around. “That’s three they got. We’ll have to give ‘em the works. Charlie, you got the grenades?”

“Yes, Cap’n.”

“Go to it.”

A machine-gun, silent for a moment, cut loose with a stuttering fusillade that raked every window in sight. Intermittent flashes came from the windows. Lead slugs rattled through the branches and thickets. The breeze of evening carried acrid powder smoke. The men in the bushes moved about warily.

Cardigan lay in a daze, conscious of the shots and the din, but in a vague, dreamy way. He wanted to yell out, and he imagined he was yelling, at the top of his lungs, but actually his lips moved only in a soundless whisper. His head throbbed with pain. MacBride had clipped him not too gently. And the captain was now bent over him, with one arm beneath him, rocking him.

The man called Charlie had worked his way closer, crawling on hands and knees, from tree to tree. Finally he stood up, and his arm swung. A small object wheeled through the dark, smacked on the roof of the house. There was a terrific explosion, and a sheet of ghastly flame billowed outward. Stones and bits of

timber sang through space, clattered in the woods. The roof caved in, parts of the walls toppled in a smother of smoke and dust.

Out of the chaos groped a man, with hands upraised. He stumbled, sprawled and hit the earth like a log. He never moved once after that. Another crawled out of the ruins, turned over on his back and lay as still as the first. The policemen advanced out of the woods. Nothing stopped them now. They closed in around the house, entered here and there through torn gaps.

MacBride hauled Cardigan to his feet, put on his hat. "You've got to get out of this, Jack," he muttered.

Cardigan was able to stumble.

"It's all over," said MacBride.

He half-dragged him back through the woods to the road, walked him along it.

"Brace up!" he ground out. "I'll put you in a taxi. Look natural. Keep your hat down, your collar up. Get back to your hotel. Stay there, for God's sake. It's all over, you hear? There is no use making a fool of yourself."

They found a taxi and Cardigan got in. MacBride gripped his hand.

"Good luck, Jack!"

"Thanks, Steve."

Cardigan rode to his hotel in a sunken mood. He got out, paid his fare, and sagged up to his room. He locked the door and slumped into a chair. He groped for a cigarette and lit it, and stared gloomily into space. He muttered something old—something about plans of mice and men…

"Hell!" he mumbled, and sank lower.

Ten minutes later the telephone rang. He looked at it darkly. He didn't know whether he should answer it. But he got up, laid his hand on it, then took off the receiver.

"Hello," he muttered.

"Jack—my room," said Fink, and that was all.

Cardigan snapped out of his mood, sucked in a hot breath. He slammed down the receiver and dived for his overcoat.

9

He climbed the rickety stairs in the ancient house in Jockey Street. He did not know what to expect. He paused a whole minute before the door until he knocked. Then he rapped. There was the sound of quick steps. Then the door swung open and Fink loomed there, grinning. He pulled Cardigan in, closed the door and locked it.

"Park your hips, Jack," he rumbled. "Have a drink."

Cardigan crossed the room, dropped to a chair and slopped liquor into a glass. He held it up. "I need this." He downed it neat. "Well?"

Fink rubbed his big hand along his thigh vigorously. "Well, Cavallo and his gang oughta be done for. Cripes, it was a great break for us! Well, I picked up Gats all right, and we drove back to the farmhouse. Then I figured maybe one o' Cavallo's guns was trailin' us. I seen a closed coupé follerin' all the way out, but I didn't let on. I swung in by the farm and I saw this coupé slow down and then shoot ahead.

"I put Gats in with the boys, and then I went out and hid in the bushes by the road. An hour later I see a big tourin' car stop down the

road and a guy get out. It was Monkey Burns. I run back to the house and plan a trap. I pull down the shades and leave a light lit. Then me and the boys skin out and hide in the bushes with our rifles.

"Little later the bums sneak up. Monkey and Cavallo and Bert Geer and six others. They creep up on the house, and Monkey tries a door. It's open. He turns to his guns and whispers and they all bunch. Then they crash the door and go in shootin'. Before they know what's what, Gats busts loose with his gun and gets the last mutt goin' in. They see they're trapped and they slam the door.

"We surround the place. Then I explain things to the boys. Then I drive off in the car, get to a booth and call Police Headquarters and tell 'em a gunfight's goin' on out there. Then I drive back and park up the road a bit. The boys was takin' pot-shots at the winders now and then. I tell 'em what I done and then run back to the road. When I see a mob o' cars whoopin' down, I whistle and the boys beat it through the woods. We sit in the car until we hear guns goin'. Then we know the cops is at it, and Cavallo and his bums still thinkin' it's us. Then we drive off, and the boys scatter in the city. Just like that."

Cardigan regarded Fink for a long moment. Then he wagged his head. "Pete, you've got a sight more brains than I ever gave you credit for. Every man in that house was killed."

"Humph. What ammunition we saved. So the cops got 'em after all. Well, who has more right than the cops?"

Cardigan went back to his hotel with a light heart. He turned in, slept well, and got the whole thing in the morning extras. At ten MacBride came in to see him. The captain looked full of news.

"Well, you know it all by this time, eh, Jack?" he asked.

"Yes."

"No, you don't." MacBride sat down and took off his hat. "There's a big shake-up. Cavallo and all his rats were wiped out last night. But Cavallo's brother-in-law, Diorio, president of the Hard Club, goes wild this morning. He got in an argument with Pozzo, his friend, the alderman, and blamed him for it all. Claimed Cavallo was framed because he knew too much—framed by Pozzo and Mulroy. It wound up by Pozzo getting shot. Pozzo passed the buck and drew in State's Attorney Mulroy. Kennedy, that wiseacre reporter, crashed in on the row and got the whole story. What dirt they raked up! It's something nobody can hush. Diorio was pinched and he sprung the whole rotten story of graft and quashed criminal cases. Pozzo threatened to have him sent up for twenty years, but Pozzo can't do a thing. He's in the net. So is Mulroy. The governor's wires have been buzzing, and in a short time we're going to see a new state's attorney and a new alderman. It's the biggest shake-up in the history of the city. And you, Jack, in your own little way, caused it, thank God!"

Cardigan smiled. "Not me, Steve—exactly."

"Who, then?"

Cardigan shrugged. "Well, let it drop. A lucky break—and a certain friend of mine." He grew grave. "Now I'm satisfied. Joe Hanley, my buddy, is vindicated. I swore he would be. I was counting on some good breaks. For a while it looked like I was wrong. But the good ones came in the end."

MacBride nodded. "It's funny, there wasn't a trace of the gang that was riding Cavallo and his guns—not a trace."

Cardigan grinned. “I hoped there wouldn’t be.”

“M-m-m,” mused MacBride. “Well, what are you going to do now?”

“That’s a question,” replied Cardigan. “I was thinking of starting a detective agency. I know the ropes, and I’m through with the Department, and I know where I can get a good right-hand man.”

“Who’s that?”

Cardigan chuckled. “You may meet him some day, Steve.”

He was thinking of Pete Fink.

Dog Eat Dog

Frederick Nebel

A city where crime and politics are organized as one business; an honest, hard-fighting Police Captain who is bucking the crowd of graft-takers and their gunmen when his own daughter is caught in the slimy mesh

1

WHEN CAPTAIN MacBRIDE was suddenly transferred from the Second Precinct to the Fifth, an undercurrent of whispered speculations trickled through the Department, buzzed in newspaper circles, and traveled along the underworld grapevine.

It was a significant move, for MacBride, besides being the youngest captain in the Department—he was barely forty—was known throughout Richmond City as a holy terror against the criminal element. He was a lank, rangy man, with a square jaw and windy blue eyes. He was brusque, talked straight from the shoulder, and was hard-boiled as a five-minute egg. Now the Second Precinct is in the very heart of Richmond City's night-life, hence an important and busy station. The Fifth is out on the frontier, in a suburb called Grove Manor, and carries the somewhat humorous sobriquet of the Old Man's Home. Plenty of reasons, then, why MacBride's transfer should have been made matter for conjecture.

MacBride said nothing. He merely tightened his hard jaw a little harder, packed up and moved. To his successor, Captain O'Leary, he made one rather ironic remark: "Well, I'll be nearer home, anyhow." He had a bungalow, a wife and an eighteen-year-old daughter in an elm-shaded street in Grove Manor.

He landed in the Fifth in the latter part of August. It was a quiet, peaceful station, with a desk sergeant who played solitaire to pass the time away and a lieutenant who used his office and the Department's time to tinker around a radio set which he had made and which still called for lots of improvement. MacBride's predecessor, retired, had spent most of his time

working out crossword puzzles. All the patrolmen, and three of the four detectives, were local men, and well on in years. The fourth detective had just been shifted from harness to plainclothes. Ted Kerr was his name; twenty-eight, sandy-haired, and a dynamo of energy and good-humor. He was ambitious, too, and cursed the luck that had placed him in the Fifth.

"Gee, Cap, it sure is a shock to see you out here," he said.

MacBride could remember when Kerr wore short pants. He grinned in his hard, tight way. "Forget it, Ted. Now that I'm here, though, I'm going to clean out a lot of the cobwebs. They say time hangs heavy on a man here. Too bad I haven't got a hobby."

"Why did they shift you, Cap?"

"Why?" MacBride creaked his swivel chair and bent over some reports on the desk, tacitly dismissing the subject.

A month dragged by, and the hard captain found ennui enveloping him. He was lounging in his tipped back chair one night, with his heels hooked on the desk, reading the newspaper account of a brutal night-club murder in his old district, when an old acquaintance dropped in— Kennedy, of the city *Free Press*.

"Oh, you," grumbled MacBride.

Kennedy helped himself to a seat. "Yeah, me. Gone to seed yet, Mac?"

"Won't be long now."

"What a tough break you got," chuckled Kennedy.

"Go ahead, rub it in. Pull a horse laugh, go on."

"I'll bet Duke Manola's laughing up his sleeve."

"That pup!"

Kennedy shrugged. "Serves you right for taking the law in your own hands. You birds can shake down a common sneak thief or a wandering wop that goes off on a gun spree coked to the eyebrows. But, Mac, you can't beat organized crime. You can't beat it when it's financed by silent partners—and those silent partners"—he arched a knowing eyebrow—"on the inside, too."

"Man, oh, man, I'm going to get that grease-ball yet!" MacBride's lip curled and his windy eyes glittered.

"Still got him on the brain, eh?" Kennedy lit a cigarette and spun the match out through the open window. "He's fire to fool with, Mac. He'll burn you surer than hell. Anyhow, you're out here in the sticks keeping the frogs and the crickets company, and you're not worrying Duke much. He's planted you where you'll do no harm. Oh, I know, Mac. There's a lot I know that the paper can't afford to print. When you raided the Nick Nack Club you stepped on Duke's toes. Not only his—but his silent partner's."

"Easy, Kennedy!"

"Easy, hell! This is just a heart-to-heart talk, Mac. Forget your loyalty to the badge when I'm around. You've kept a stiff upper lip, and you'll continue to. But just keep in the mind that here's one bird who knows his tricks. I know—see?—I know that Judge Haggerty is the Duke's silent partner in those three night-clubs he runs. Haggerty's aiming for Supreme Court Justice, and he needs lots of jack for his campaign. And he's not going to let a tough nut of a police captain get in his way."

MacBride bit the reporter with a keen, hard eye. After a long moment he swung his

feet down from the desk and pulled open a drawer.

"Have a drink, Kennedy."

He drew out a bottle and a glass and set them down. Kennedy poured himself a stiff three fingers and downed it neat, rasped his throat.

"Good stuff, Mac," he said.

"Have another."

"Thanks."

Kennedy measured off another three fingers and swallowed the contents at a gulp, stared meditatively at the empty glass, then set it down quietly.

"Now, Mac," he said, looking up obliquely, while the ghost of a smile played around his lips. "I'll tell you what I came here for."

"Came to razz me, I thought."

"No. That's just my roundabout way of getting at things. One reason why I got kicked off the city desk."

MacBride felt that something important was in the wind. Sometimes he liked Kennedy; other times, he felt like wringing the news-hound's neck. Clever, this Kennedy, sharp as a steep trap.

"Well," he said, leaning back, "shoot."

"Just this, Mac. Maybe you're going to run up against Duke again."

"Go ahead."

Kennedy's smile was thin, almost mocking. "Duke's bought that old brewery out off Farmingville Turnpike."

MacBride's chair creaked once, and then remained silent. His stare bored into the lazy, whimsical eyes of the reporter. A sardonic twist pulled down one corner of his mouth.

"What's that wop up to?" he growled, deep in his throat.

"I've got a hunch, Mac. He's getting crowded in the city. He's going to make beer there—the real stuff, I mean. And gin. And—" he leaned forward—"he's going to rub it in—on you."

"He is, eh?" MacBride's voice hardened. "He'll take one step too many. He's getting cocky now. I never saw a wop yet who didn't overstep himself. Riding on my tail, eh? Well, we'll see, Kennedy. Let him move out of turn and I'll jump him. That wop can't kick me in the slats and get away with it. The booze I don't give a damn about. I wouldn't have cared how many speakeasies he ran in the city. But when he ran stud games in the back rooms and reached out for soused suckers I got sore. That's why I broke the Nick Nack Club. It was three in the morning, and among the bums in the back room were two guns from Chicago."

Kennedy chuckled. "That was when Captain Stephen MacBride pulled one of the biggest bones in his career. What a beautiful swan song that was! Hot diggity!"

MacBride rose to his lean, rangy height and cracked fist into palm.

"Boy, but I'm aching to meet that dago! I hope to hell he does make a bum move!"

"He put you out in the sticks; out," added Kennedy whimsically, "in the Old Man's Home. And you're sore, Mac. I can foresee some hot stuff on the frontier, and Grove Manor on the map."

MacBride swung to face him, his feet spread wide. “Just that, Kennedy—just that. They shoved me out here to cool off and grow stale. But I’m not the guy to grow stale. Duke’s cracking wise. Maybe he thinks that the transfer has shut me up. Maybe he thinks he can ride me and get away with it. Let him—that’s all—just let him!”

There was a knock at the door, and then Sergeant Haley looked in, his beefy face flushed with excitement.

“Carlson’s on the wire, Cap’n. There’s been a smash-up out on Old Stone Road. Carlson was riding along in the patrol flivver when he saw a big touring car tangled up against a tree half in the bushes. There’s a dead man in the car but Carlson can’t get him out ‘count of the wreckage.”

MacBride snorted. “Is Carlson so hard up for company that he has to call up about a wreck?”

“No, but he says he thinks there’s something fluky about it. He says there’s a woman’s footprints near the car, but he didn’t see no woman.”

“Maybe she walked home,” put in Kennedy. “Lot of that going on these days.”

“I’ll speak to him,” clipped MacBride, and sat down at his desk.

Sergeant Haley went out and switched over the call and it took MacBride only a minute to get the details. Then he hung up and, pouring himself a drink, corked the bottle and dropped it back into the drawer.

“The ride will do me good,” he remarked as he slapped on his cap.

“Me, too,” added Kennedy.

MacBride looked at him. “You’re out of your territory, aren’t you?”

“What the hell!”

On the way out MacBride told the sergeant, “When Kelly and Kerr drift in—God knows where they are now—tell ‘em to hang around. Call up the nearest garage and tell ‘em to send a wreckage crew out to Old Stone Road, about a mile north of Pine Tree Park. Buzz the morgue and tell ‘em to send the bus to the same place. Tell ‘em tonight, not sometime next week. When Lieutenant Miller gets fed up on monkeying with his radio, ask him to kindly take care of things till I get back. When you work out your present game of solitaire, I’d appreciate your getting those delinquent reports as near up to date as you’re able. I won’t be long.”

Outside, he stopped on the curb to light a fresh cigar. Then he followed Kennedy into the police car, and said, “Shoot, Donnegan,” to the man at the wheel.

2

Out of the hub of town, the car struck Old Stone Road and followed it past neat, new bungalows and later, past fields and intermittent groves of piney woods. Once through Pine Tree Park, the road became darker, lined by heavier woods, with not even an occasional house to relieve the gloom.

Donnegan, at the wheel, pointed to a pair of headlights far up the road, and when they drew nearer, MacBride saw a small two-seater flivver parked on the side and a policeman in uniform spreading his arms to stop them. Kennedy hopped out and MacBride followed him.

“There it is,” said Carlson, and pointed to a tangled heap of wreckage against a tree

alongside the highway. MacBride strode over, and Carlson followed, snapped on a flashlight and played its white beam over the ruined car.

"Three thousand bucks shot to hell," observed Kennedy. "And still insurance companies make money." He sniffed. "Who's the stiff?"

"Don't know," muttered MacBride and made a gesture which indicated that the man was so deeply buried beneath the wreck that they could not get him. He turned to Carlson. "You said something about footprints."

"Yeah, Cap. See?" He swung his flash down to the soft earth around the car. "Sure, a woman's."

MacBride nodded, then said, "But she never got out of this car after it struck."

The wreck offered mute evidence to that statement. Its radiator was caved in half the length of the long, streamlined hood, and the cowl and part of the hood were crushed up through the windshield frame. Beneath this, and wedged in by the left side of the car, lay the man who had been at the wheel, face downward, the steering-wheel broken and twisted around his chest.

"I been wonderin' where the woman could have went," ventured Carlson.

"Whoever she was, she must have walked away," said MacBride. "Her footprints wouldn't show on the macadam." He added, after a moment, "At any rate, I'll bet my hat she wasn't in the car when it socked that tree."

Donnegan called out, "Guess this is the wrecker."

It was. The wrecking outfit from the garage rolled up, and two men in overalls got out.

"Hello, boys," greeted MacBride. "Before you haul this piece of junk away, there's a dead man inside. See if you can chop away some of the wreck."

The two men pulled axes from their car and set to work and hacked away at the snarled mass of metal. MacBride stood at one side, sucking on his cigar, offering no suggestion to men who knew their business and were doing the best they could. Presently he saw them lay down their axes, and he stepped over to help.

Bit by bit they hauled out the broken, bloodstained body, and laid it down on the ground. MacBride bent down on one knee and taking Carlson's flashlight, snapped on the switch. He grimaced, but gritted his teeth. A swarthy young face, the face of a boy in his early twenties.

"Hot diggity!" exclaimed Kennedy.

MacBride looked up. "What's eating you?

"Don't you know him?" cried Kennedy, his usually tired eyes alight with interest.

"Frankly, I don't."

Kennedy slapped his knee. "Duke Manola's kid brother!"

"Hell!" grunted MacBride, and took a swift look at the discolored face.

"He was always a sheik with the ladies."

"I've heard of him," nodded MacBride. "Now what the cripes kind of a stunt did he try to pull?"

"Simple," shrugged Kennedy. "Got fresh with some broad probably."

"But how did the broad shake the wreck? I still say she wasn't in the car when it

hit. Man alive, there'd been no chance of her walking after that!"

"The crack reporter of the *Free Press* agrees with the astute captain's common sense remark. But wait till Duke gets wind of it. You know these wops. Tweak the nose of a forty-eighth cousin and the whole shooting-match sharpens up their stilettos. Boy, don't I know!"

"Well, if he started playing around it's his tough luck. The trouble with a lot of these sheiks is that they're so used to the yes-girls that when they meet another kind they get sore—and nasty."

Kennedy rasped his throat. "Picture a decent gal trotting out with a marcelled sheik like Joe Manola! Don't tell me!"

MacBride shrugged as he stood up. He took his flashlight and mounted the wreck, shooting the beam down through the twisted metal. A moment later he stood up and held a short, stubby automatic in his hand.

"One shot fired," he said. "Not long ago, either." He had rubbed his finger across the muzzle, and looked at the black streak it left.

A siren screamed through the night, and two headlights came racing down the road. It was the morgue bus, and it pulled up behind the patrol flivver.

"What kind of a gun?" asked Kennedy.

"Thirty-two," shot back MacBride, and with a sudden movement crossed to the body and knelt down.

Kennedy trailed after him and bent over his shoulder. Then MacBride stood up, wiping his hands, a glitter in his eyes.

"He was shot, Kennedy. Shot through the right side."

"And then he hit the tree!"

"Exactly."

Kennedy whistled. "When the Duke hears this!"

MacBride turned to one of the man from the morgue bus. "You can take him. But there's a slug somewhere inside. I want it after the autopsy."

A few minutes later the bus shot off with its dead cargo, and MacBride turned to watch the wrecking-car tugging at the smashed machine.

Its derrick hoisted up the front end, and thus the rear wheels were in a condition to move.

"Keep it in the garage," said MacBride, "and I'll take care of your bill."

When the wreck had gone, with the rear red light winking in the distance, Kennedy made for the police car. "Well, let's be going, Mac. This'll be in the early editions."

MacBride started to follow, but turned and retraced his steps to where the wreck had lain. His flash played on the gashed tree and down on to the gouged ground. His eyes narrowed and he bent over, picked up something that shimmered in the white light.

In the palm of his hand lay an emerald pendant, attached to a thin gold chain that had been broken. His lips parted in a sharp intake of breath, and his hand knotted over the pendant.

"Oh, shake it up, Mac," called Kennedy.

MacBride turned and strode to the police car with hesitant steps. He climbed in and closed the door softly behind him. His hand, still holding the emerald pendant, slid into his pocket and remained there.

"Shoot, Donnegan," he clipped.

3

On the way back through town, MacBride had the car stop in front of a cigar store.

"Want to get some cigars," he told Kennedy, and strode into the store.

He bought half-a-dozen cigars, spent no more than a minute in a telephone booth, and then returned to the waiting car.

"Have one," he offered Kennedy.

"You were always a good-natured Scotchman," grinned Kennedy.

A couple of minutes later they walked into the station, and Kennedy made for the telephone, and shot the news into his office. Then he said, "Duty calls, Mac. Something tells me I'll be seeing you often."

"Don't make it too often," growled MacBride.

Kennedy waved and strolled out to catch a trolley back to the city.

MacBride tipped back his cap, revealing strands of damp hair plastered to his forehead by perspiration. His chiseled face looked a bit drawn.

He addressed Sergeant Haley huskily—"Call up the Nick Nack Club. Leave word to be delivered to Duke Manola that his brother was found dead at ten-thirty tonight—"

"Dead!" exclaimed Haley, who hadn't recorded a killing in his precinct in ten years.

"Don't butt in," recommended MacBride, lazily, as though deep within him he was very, very weary. "Do that. Found dead in a wrecked car on Old Stone Road, near Pine Tree Park. Tell 'em the body's at the morgue and may be reclaimed after the autopsy. No hint as to who shot him. No"—his teeth ground into his lower lip—"no clues. Make out your regular report and file it. Joseph Manola. We'll get his age and other incidentals later."

"Looks like murder, Cap'n!"

"Ye-es, it looks like murder," droned MacBride, sagging toward his office.

Ted Kerr came in briskly from another room, stopped short in the path of the captain.

"In here," said MacBride, and led the way into his office.

He sank into his chair, slammed his cap down on the desk and took a stiff drink.

"Hear you went out to investigate a wreck," ventured Kerr.

"Ye-es. And ran into a murder." MacBride's hand was in his pocket fingering the emerald pendant.

"Well!"

"Don't get worked up," dragged out MacBride.

"You look all in," said Kerr, seriously.

"Never mind me. What's on your mind?"

"Well, nothing much. Kelly and I were out to the Blue River Inn. You know there's been some complaints about raw parties being pulled off there. Pretty quiet tonight. Couple of drunken dames and a few soused college boys. And then—well…" He hesitated, and looked away, his lips compressed.

"Well, what?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just…" He paused again.

"Come on, Ted. Let's have it."

"Well, I just got a bit of a shock, that's all." His clean-cut face bore a vaguely hurt expression. "Well, Judith was there—"

MacBride snapped forward, his eyes keened. "Yes!"

"Why, what's the matter, Cap?"

"Keep talking. Judith was there. Who with?"

"Oh, hell, I shouldn't have said anything about it. But I've sort of liked Judith—"

"Don't say like when you mean love. And?"

"Well, she was there, that's all. Was another girl with her. Never saw the other girl. Kind of— well, brassy type. Chic looking and all that but— brassy. And two fellows. The one with Judith was young and dark—looked like an Italian sheik. The other fellow was older—so was the girl. I didn't let on I saw them. They had a couple of drinks, then breezed in a big, classy touring car. Don't bawl Judith out, Cap. I shouldn't have told you, but—well, it just came out. Judith's a good girl. I guess I've got a nerve to think I ever had a chance—me just a dick. Promise me you won't say anything to her about it."

MacBride drew in a deep breath and held it trapped in his lungs for a long moment. Then he let it out, slowly, noiselessly, and followed it with a sigh.

"Ah-r- it's a rough, tough world, Ted, old timer."

Kerr attempted to change the subject. "But what about this murder, Cap?"

"It's going to start something—something big—big! Well, I've got my wish—but not in the way I'd expected." He was thinking of his wish that Duke Manola would face him again for a showdown.

"What wish, Cap?" asked Ted Kerr.

"No matter. Joe Manola was the bird got killed. He's Duke Manola's brother, and the Duke can call two dozen gunmen any time he wants to."

The telephone on the desk jangled. MacBride leaned forward, picking up the receiver and said, "Captain MacBride—"

"Yes, MacBride," came a voice with a hint of a nasal snarl. "This is your old playmate, Manola."

"The elder," supplemented MacBride.

"Be funny," snapped Duke Manola. "I just heard my kid brother was bumped off out in the sticks. What's the lay?"

"No lay yet, Duke. When I get the lay I'll send you an engraved copy of the report, autographed."

"Crack wise, big boy, crack wise."

"And—"

"You better snap on it, MacBride. I'm just telling you, get the pup or pups that winged the kid before I do. And don't get tough, either. Kind of a sock on your jaw, eh? You having to work for the guy gave you a buggy ride out to God's country!"

"Lay off that, Duke. And don't *you* get tough. You keep your hands out of this. And

take a tip: Try to play around in this neck of the woods and I'll flop on you like a ton of brick. I'll handle this case, and I don't want any dirty greaseball getting in my light."

"I may drop in for tea soon, big boy."

"If I never saw you, Duke, that'd be years too soon. There's no Welcome sign hanging out here, and there's no good-luck horseshoe parked over the door. In short, I'm not entertaining."

"Whistle that, guy, and go to hell!" With that a sharp click indicated that Duke Manola had hung up.

MacBride slammed down the receiver, and Kerr offered, with a half-grin, "You men don't seem to get along so well."

"We get along worse every day," replied MacBride.

Kerr lit a cigarette. "Any clues on that murder, Cap?"

MacBride's hand was in his pocket, and it clenched the emerald pendant in sweaty fingers.

"No, Ted," he muttered.

4

Mrs. MacBride was a woman of thirty-eight who still retained much of her youthful charm. The onyx sheen of her hair was not threaded by the slightest wisp of gray. Ordinarily, at breakfast time, she was a bright-eyed, animated woman, with a song on her lips and pleasant banter for her husband; and occasionally, as she passed back and forth from the kitchen, a kiss for the captain's cheek. Secretly, MacBride cherished this show of affection.

But something in his attitude that morning— or it may have been something in the heart of his wife—tended to eliminate this little by-play. There was a song on her lips, but it was in an unnatural, off-tone key.

When they sat down at the table facing each other, MacBride, without looking up from his morning paper, said, "Judith up yet?"

"Yes. She'll be right in, Steve." She went about sprinkling sugar on the grapefruit. "Grove Manor must have gasped this morning when they read the papers about—about—"

"Yes," nodded MacBride. "Haven't had a murder here in ten years."

"You'll be careful, Steve."

He glanced up. "Careful, Ann?"

"Well—you never can tell. I'm always worried."

"Oh, nonsense, Ann. You shouldn't worry—"

There was a step on the stair, and Judith came in, quietly. Ordinarily she entered at a skip, vivacious, animated. Her hair was jet black, and bobbed short, in the extremely modern manner. Likewise was her mode of dress extremely modern.

"Morning, dad. Morning, ma." Cheerful the tone, but with a faintly hollow ring.

As she crossed to the table she limped a trifle, but it escaped MacBride's eyes. His gaze was riveted on the newspaper.

"Morning, Judith," he said.

When she was seated, he folded his paper and laid it aside.

It seemed that Mrs. MacBride was holding her breath.

Hard on the outside, hard with men who were hard, he had always found it difficult to be hard at home. He wanted to eliminate a lot of preliminary talk. Somehow, he did not want to see a woman of his own crumpling bit by bit under a lightning parry and thrust of words.

He drew his hand from his pocket and laid the emerald pendant on the table.

"Yours, Judith?"

But the girl had already blanched. Mrs. MacBride sat stiff and straight, her hands clenched in her lap, the color draining from her tightly compressed lips.

"It was found," went on MacBride slowly, clumsily gentle, "beside a wrecked car on Old Stone Road last night."

"Oh!" breathed Judith, and looked to left and right, as if seeking an avenue of escape.

"Come, now, little girl," pursued MacBride. "Tell me about it. What happened?"

Judith jerked up from her chair, started for the stairs leading to her room.

"Judith!"

She dragged to a stop and turned.

"Please, Steve!" choked Mrs. MacBride. She got up and put an arm around her daughter.

"Ann, please stay out of this," recommended MacBride; and to the girl, "Judith, tell me about it. I know you were out in the company of the man who was murdered last night! I'll have to have an explanation!"

"I—I can't tell!" came her muffled, panicky voice.

"But you must!" he insisted sternly.

"No—no! I can't! I won't! Oh, please!…"

He crossed the room and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Do you realize the significance of this? I don't say you killed Manola. But you were out with him, and you know what happened on that road. Judith! Out with one of the worst rakes in the city—the brother of Duke Manola, the gang leader and—my enemy! My God, girl, what have you been thinking of? Isn't Ted Kerr good enough for you? Or does a classy car and a marcelled wop win you?"

She was crying now, but through it all she kept reiterating—"I won't tell! I won't tell!"

"Judith, so help me, you will!"

"No—no! I won't! You can beat me! You— can—beat—me! I won't tell! Oh-o-o-o!…"

"Steve," implored Mrs. MacBride, "don't— please!"

"Ann, be still! Do you think I enjoy this? How do you think I felt last night when I picked that pendant up by the wreck? God, it's a wonder the hawkeyed Kennedy didn't see me! Judith, listen to reason. You've got to tell me!"

She spun back, her hands clenched, a storm of terror in her moist eyes—tense, quivering, like a cornered animal, and defiant.

"No—no—never! You can't make me. Dear God, you can't!"

She pivoted and clawed her way up the stairs, fled into her room and locked the door.

Half-way up the staircase, MacBride stopped, turned and came down slowly, his face a frozen mask.

"To think, to think!" he groaned.

His wife touched him with her hands, and he took them in his own and looked down into her swimming eyes.

"Ann, I wish you could make me happy, but just now—you can't. I'm as miserable, as sunk, as you are."

Years seemed to creep upon him visibly. He picked up the pendant and dropped it into his pocket.

5

At five that evening MacBride was sitting at his desk in the precinct, when Ted Kerr breezed in, closed the door quietly and stood, wiping perspiration from his forehead.

"Well?" asked MacBride.

"I was out there. Kline, the bird that runs the Blue River Inn, acted dumb. He didn't remember the party of four. Had never seen them before. In short, didn't know them."

"Think he's on the level?"

"No." Kerr dropped to a chair. "I could see he was walking on soft ground, watching his step. It's my bet that he knows the two fellows." He paused. "How—how's Judith?"

"Still love her?"

"Well, God, Cap, she's in trouble—"

"Sh! Soft pedal, Ted!"

Kerr spoke in a husky whisper. "I don't believe she's done bad. She wouldn't. Just lost her head. Damn these oily birds with their flashy cars!"

"Listen. If you saw the guy who was with Manola again, would you recognize him?"

"Sure."

"Then take a trolley to Headquarters and look over the Rogues' Gallery. Call me up if you have any luck."

Kerr took his departure, and a little later Kelly entered and said, "Yup, Cap, there's men out in that brewery where you sent me. I heard some hammerin' goin' on like, and the windows on the third floor—that's the top, you know—them windows was open, they was. Then I seen two cars parked inside the fence, under the sheds where the beer used to be loaded on trucks. Classy cars—one a big sedan, all black—number A2260. The other was a sport roadster, C4002. Nobody was around them."

On his desk pad MacBride marked down the type and number of the two cars. He dismissed Kelly and then called up the automobile license bureau. The sport roadster, he found, belonged to a man named John A. Winslow. The sedan was owned by Judge Michael Haggerty.

MacBride sat back with a bitter chuckle. "That sounds like 'Diamond Jack' Winslow, the race-track kid. H'm. And Mike Haggerty. Cheek and jowl with Duke Manola."

He lit a cigar and looked up to find Detective-Sergeant O'Dowd, from Headquarters.

"Hello, O'Dowd."

"Hello, Mac. I just dropped in with a little order from the big cheese. Know that brewery out off Farmingville Turnpike?"

MacBride nodded.

O'Dowd said, "Well, don't let it worry you, Mac. They're making some good beer there, and orders are to leave 'em be."

"I've been waiting for those orders," said MacBride. "So long as they bust the Volstead Act and don't make any noise, it's O.K. by me. Anything else, though—"

"Let your conscience be your guide, Mac," grinned O'Dowd, and left.

The machinery of the underworld and politics, mused MacBride, was getting under way. Kerr called up a little later, and he had information.

"I'm sure it's the same guy, Cap," he said. "Chuck Devore. The records show he was arrested two years ago in connection with the shooting of a taxi driver named Max Levy. But he wasn't indicted."

"We're hot, Ted," shot back MacBride. "Devore is a gangster, and a pretty tough egg. He used to run with Duke Manola. In that killing two years ago we had the hunch that Manola tried to frame Devore to take the rap. Then they broke and Devore drifted. If he's back in town, there's a pot of trouble brewing."

"You mean a gang war?"

"Right. Dog eat dog stuff, and hell's going to pop or I miss my guess. All right, Ted. Hop a trolley home."

MacBride slammed down the receiver and sat back rubbing his hands. Devore back in town! But what had he been doing in the company of Duke Manola's brother? And who was the woman in the case—besides Judith? A chill shot through MacBride. His own daughter mixed up in an underworld feud!

He snapped up to his feet, changed from his uniform coat and cap into a plain blue jacket and a gray fedora. He strode out of his office, told Donnegan to get the car out, and left brief instructions with Sergeant Haley.

Outside, he climbed into the car and said, "Know the Blue River Inn?"

Donnegan said, "Yes."

"That's where we're going.' Don't run right up to it. Park back a distance, out of sight."

The car shot off through town, hit Old Stone Road and followed it into Farmingville Turnpike. Half an hour later Donnegan pulled up on the side of the road, in the shadow of a deep woods. Up ahead they could see *Blue River Inn*, picked out in electric light bulbs.

"You wait here, Donnegan," said MacBride. "I won't be long."

The inn was large and rambling, two storied, with many windows. MacBride entered the large, carpeted room that served as a lobby, and the head-waiter, with a menu in his hand, bowed.

"I'm not eating," clipped MacBride. "Who runs this dump?"

"Sir?"

"Cut out the flowers, buddy. I'm from the precinct." He flashed his badge. "Snap on it!"

A short, rotund man in dinner clothes came strolling in from the main corridor, and the head-waiter, a little troubled, beckoned to him.

"You the owner?" asked MacBride. "What's your name?"

"Hinkle, owner and manager. What can I do for you?"

"I'm MacBride, from the precinct. There were two couples in here last night— *You*!" he suddenly shot at the head-waiter. "Stay here! Now," he went on, "who were the two men?"

"Of course," said Hinkle, "there are so many people come here, we cannot recall them. So many are transients."

"Look here," pursued MacBride. "One of those men was Joe Manola, who was later killed in a wreck last night. Now who was the other guy—the guy with him?"

Hinkle moistened his lips and his eyes shifted nervously. "I'm sorry. I don't know. Nor does my head-waiter."

The girl at the desk trilled, "Mr. Hinkle, telephone."

Hinkle went over to the desk, and MacBride followed, stood beside him. Hinkle picked up the telephone, and said, "Yes, Hinkle talking." And then his face blanched, and his lips began to writhe.

MacBride's gun came out of his pocket, jammed against Hinkle's adipose paunch. He tore the receiver from Hinkle's hand and clasped it to his own ear, heard—

"… and get that, Hinkle. Act dumb, all the time, see. And if it gets too hot, call me on the wire. Got that number? Main 1808?"

MacBride's lips moved silently, forming the words, "Say yes, Hinkle."

"Yes, yes," said Hinkle, his face pasty white.

"O.K. then," was the reply, and the man at the other end hung up.

MacBride hung up, set down the telephone, a thin, hard smile on his face.

"Who was that, Hinkle?"

Hinkle wilted, blubbered, kept shaking his head.

"Chuck Devore, eh?" grinned MacBride, without humor.

"Oh, G-God!" choked Hinkle, gasping for air and reeling backward.

MacBride picked up the telephone and called the precinct. To Sergeant Haley he said, "Send a man out around to the telephone exchange. Tell the operators there to allow no calls incoming or outgoing from"—he looked down at the number on the phone—"Farmingville 664. Also, no calls to be connected, outgoing or incoming, to Main 1808. Until further notice from the station. Also, get me the address of Main 1808, quick, and ring me at Farmingville 664 before the order to shut off. Snap on it, sergeant!"

He hung up, stepped to the door and blew his whistle. When Donnegan came in on the run, MacBride said, "No hurry. Just stay here and keep your eyes on these two men till you get word from the precinct. Don't let them get out of sight. Go in the dining-room and tell all the guests to clear out."

There were only a dozen-odd persons in the dining-room, and they made an angry and protesting exodus. When they had gone, MacBride said to Donnegan. "Let no more in. See that no more cars leave."

The telephone rang, and he picked it up, listened. "All right, sergeant," he said. "I'll have to pass there on the way through. Tell Kelly and Kerr to be ready and I'll pick them up."

He turned from the telephone, looked at the group of waiters and at Hinkle and his steward. Then he looked at Donnegan. "Keep them salted, Donnegan, right in this room. You, Hinkle, have your sign shut off and all the lights

in the house except in this room. You're temporarily closed for business."

"It's an outrage!" choked Hinkle.

"See if I care," chuckled MacBride; and to Donnegan, "I'll take the car."

6

Kelly and Kerr were waiting outside of the precinct when MacBride drew up.

"Hop in, boys. We're going for maybe a little target practice."

Kelly shifted his chew and climbed in, and Kerr, eagerness sparking in his eyes, followed. MacBride stepped on the gas and they shot off.

"What's the lay, Cap?" asked Kelly.

"We're going to look up Chuck Devore, at a dump in lower Jockey Street. There may be a fight. You boys well heeled?"

They were. And as they drove on, MacBride explained about his pilgrimage to the Blue River Inn.

They made good time into the city. Traffic on Main Street, the artery of theatres and cabarets, held them up.

Presently MacBride turned into Jockey Street and followed it west. Near Main Street, small restaurants, Chinese or Italian, displayed their signs. Further along, it changed to blank-faced brick houses, old and peeling, with here and there a single globe of light marking out a speakeasy. The municipal lighting system was poor, and the way was dark.

MacBride pulled up in the middle of a block and said, "It's on the next block, but we'll leave the car here. Come on."

They got out and continued down Jockey Street with MacBride taking long strides in the lead. There was a noticeable jut to his teak-hard jaw and a windy look in his blue eyes. He was not the man to grow stale from sitting on his spine in a precinct office. The game on the outside still lured him—the somewhat dangerous game of poking into back alleys and underworld hideouts.

He slowed down, but did not stop. "This is the house, boys. Number 40. Don't stop. All dark except the third floor. Shades drawn there, but you can see the light through the cracks. I know this neighborhood. They have a lookout in the hall, and a man needs a password to get in. A red light dump without the red lights. We'll see if there's a way to it from the next street."

At the next block they turned south, and then east into the next street. Between the houses here they could see the backs of the houses on Jockey Street.

"There it is," pointed out MacBride. "That three-story place, taller than the others." He stopped. "Here's an alley. Come on."

They swung into a dark, narrow passageway that led between two wooden houses and on into a small yard criss-crossed with clothes-lines. Separating this yard from that of the one belonging to the house in Jockey Street was a high board fence. Behind this, the three paused and looked up. All floors were dark except the third and top-most.

MacBride gripped the top of the fence, heaved up and over, landed in soft earth. Kerr and Kelly followed and they stood hunched closely, whispering. MacBride pointed to the fire-escape.

"Up we go. You boys trail me. Easy!" he warned.

He led the way up the ladders, his gun drawn. Nearing the top story, he went more cautiously, more quietly, and turned once to recommend silence with a finger tapping his lips. At the third floor he stopped, hunched over. The window was open, a half-drawn shade crackling in the draft.

Slowly MacBride raised his head and peered in over the sill. Four men were sitting around a table in shirt-sleeves, their collars open. A bottle and glasses were on the table, and MacBride caught whiffs of cigarette smoke. He saw Chuck Devore in profile. Devore was a tall, smooth-shaven man of thirty, with curly brown hair and a cleft chin. His eyes were deep-set and peculiarly luminous. In repose, his face was not bad to look at—except for the strange, impenetrable eyes. MacBride had never seen the others, but all of them bore the stamp of hard, dangerous living. The most outstanding, besides Devore, was a huge bull of a man with flaming red hair and a heavy jaw.

"It will be a cinch," Devore was saying. "We can bust in about three a.m. and stick up the works, and you can take it from me, there'll be no small change. Not with Diamond Jack Winslow in on the show and a lot of big political guns. And they can't yap. That's where we've got them. They're playing a crooked game, and if the public got wind of it, Perrone would have about as much chance of getting in the alder-manic show as I would. And Haggerty'd land on his can, too."

"And won't Duke Manola get sore!" chuckled the red-head.

"Yes, the lousy bum!" snapped Devore. "Cripes, his kid brother spilled a lot of beans. Wild sheik, that bird was."

"Yeah—*mas*," nodded the red-head.

"I feel a draft," said Devore, and got up, coming toward the window.

He walked into the muzzle of MacBride's thirty-eight.

"Nice, now, Chuck!" bit off MacBride. "Up high."

He stepped in through the window, and Kerr was half-way through behind him, his gun covering the startled group at the table.

Then came Kelly, slit-eyed, dangerous.

"What's the meaning of this, Mac?" snarled Devore.

"Be your age, Chuck," said MacBride.

No one saw a hand sliding in through a door that led to another room. This hand, slim and white, felt for the light-switch, found it, and pressed the button.

The room was thrown into sudden darkness. Chairs scraped. A door banged.

A dagger of flame slashed through the gloom, and a man screamed, his body hit the floor with a thud.

MacBride found Devore on his hands, and the gangster was trying to twist the captain's gun arm behind his back.

"No, you don't, Devore!"

MacBride heaved with him, spun through the darkness, crashed into other struggling figures. He slammed Devore against the wall, and Devore tried to use his knee for a dirty blow.

MacBride blocked with his hip and banged Devore's head to the wall, again and again. Then Devore twisted and dragged out of

the jam, but MacBride heaved against him and they crashed to the floor.

Struggling feet stumbled over their twisting bodies, and curses ripped through the darkness. Another shot banged out, went wild and shattered a light bulb in the chandelier. The table toppled, and somebody crashed over a chair.

Then the door leading to the hall was flung open and dim figures hurtled through it on the way out, their feet pounding on the floor. Devore planted his knee brutally in MacBride's stomach and the captain buckled, gasping for breath. Then Devore tore free, reeled about the room and dived for the open door.

But MacBride caught his breath, heaved up and lunged after him. Doors opened and banged, but nobody came out to get in the way. Somewhere far below MacBride heard a sharp exchange of shots. He catapulted after Devore who was racing down the staircase. Near the bottom, he leaped through space and landing on Devore's neck, crashed him to the floor.

Devore groaned and relaxed. MacBride straddled him, drew out manacles and settled Devore's status for the time being. He stood up, wiping blood from his face, shoving wet strands of hair back from his forehead. He heard footsteps rushing up from below? and swung around with his gun leveled.

It was Ted Kerr, his clothes in tatters and a couple of blue welts on his face.

"They got away, Cap," he explained. "Through the back. Went through a door, slammed it and locked it. Kelly and I tried to bust it, but no can do. I came up to see if you were all right. One was wounded. Here's Kelly."

Kelly puffed up, his collar gone but his tie still draped around his neck.

"Take this guy," MacBride said, jerking a thumb toward Devore. "I'll be right down."

He went upstairs two steps at a time and entered the gang's quarters. He lit a match, found the light switch and snapped it. The room was in ruin, and the shade still clicked in the draft. He crossed to another door, stood to one side, then turned the knob and kicked the door open. A light was burning inside, and a breeze blowing through an open window.

Entering, MacBride set it down as a room used by a woman. There was a littered dressing table, and a bureau with several drawers half out and signs indicatory of somebody having made a quick getaway. A cursory examination revealed no tell-tale clues. MacBride turned out the lights, left the rooms, and descended the staircase.

Devore was standing up now, between Kerr and Kelly, and venom was burning in his strange, enigmatic eyes.

MacBride said, "Now for a little buggy ride, Devore."

"You're going to regret this, MacBride," the man snarled. "By cripes, you are!"

"Cut out the threats, you bum!"

"Cut out hell! Before you know what's what I'm going to have you tied by the heels."

"Should I sock him, Cap?" inquired Kelly.

"No. He'll get a lot of that later, where it's more convenient." MacBride's hand clenched, and his lips flattened back against his teeth.

Devore smiled, mockingly. "We'll see, MacBride—*we'll see!*"

7

It was about half-past ten when the police car rolled into Grove Manor. Ted Kerr was at the wheel. Devore sat in the rear, between MacBride and Kelly.

"Looks like a crowd in front of the station," sang out Kerr.

"'Swing into the next block," said MacBride. "Probably some photographers and—no doubt— that very good friend of mine, Kennedy, with his nose for news, and his wisecracks."

The car turned into a dark street several blocks this side of the police station and halted.

"What should I do, Cap?" asked Kerr.

MacBride was thinking. "Let's see. H'm. Drive around the back way, Ted. Park a block away from the station. I'll run this bird in the back way, right into my office. You and Kelly drive up a little later. And don't spill any beans—keep your traps shut. Then you come in my office, Ted, and we'll see."

Kerr drove off slowly, cut around the back of the town and came up a dark, poorly paved street that ran back of the station. When he pulled up, MacBride hauled Devore out and marched him off. They took a path that led through a vacant lot and on up to the back of the station.

Here MacBride, using a key, opened a door and shoved Devore in, then followed and, locking the door, guided the gangster along a dark hallway that ended against another door. MacBride unlocked this and stepped into his office, relocked it quickly and crossing to the door that led into the central room, shoved shut the bolt. Then he turned with a sigh of relief, took off his cap and sailed it across his desk.

"Take the load off your feet, Devore," he droned, and pulling open a drawer in his desk, hauled out a bottle and downed a stiff bracer. He turned to Devore. "Dry?"

"I don't drink slops, thanks."

"You can go to hell," chuckled MacBride, slamming shut the drawer.

"Listen," jerked out Devore. "Let me use that phone. I gotta talk to my lawyer."

"Try setting that to music, guy. You're calling no lawyer. You're seeing no one. And the newspapers aren't going to know I've got you. I'm top-dog, you dirty slob, and you're going to come across!"

"About what?"

"Ask me another," scoffed MacBride. "About the killing of Joe Manola. Now don't try to hand me a song and dance, Devore. I was listening outside the window on the fire-escape. I heard you and your guns talking."

"How did you get the lay on me, MacBride?"

"Don't worry about that, Devore. The thing is, I've got you, and you're going to come across."

Devore leaned forward, his teeth bared, but not in a smile. "How about your kid daughter, big boy?"

"Yes, you pup, how about her?" exploded MacBride, a bad light in his eyes.

"Sound nice, won't it? Daughter of Captain MacBride linked up with gangsters. Think it over, MacBride."

"I'm thinking it over, Devore. It's a blow—a sock flush on the button, but I'll weather it. She'll have to talk, sooner or later,

even though she is my daughter. But she's been framed somehow. And what I want to know is, who's the woman who was in the quartette last night at the Blue River?"

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know!" Devore snarled; and then snapped, "Try and find out, you big bum!"

There was a knock on the door. MacBride walked over and asked, "Who is it?"

"Ted."

He opened the door and Ted Kerr slipped in. MacBride snapped shut the bolt. Kerr scowled at Devore.

"Right at home, eh, Devore? You won't be," he threatened.

MacBride said, "Keep your eye on him, Ted. I'm going out and give the gang the air."

There was a sizable crowd waiting for news. Four reporters, three photographers. And Kennedy, with his whimsical smile.

"Ah, captain," he chortled, "and now you broadcast."

MacBride bored him with a keen stare. "You're wasting your time, Kennedy. On your way—all of you boys. No news tonight."

"But who's the bird you've got?" demanded a reporter from the city news association.

"You heard me," shot back MacBride. "No news. There's a trolley goes through here in five minutes. Take a tip. Hop it."

"Aw, for cripe's sakes," protested Kennedy. "Be a sport, Cap. Think of all the good breaks I've put in your way."

"Think of all the good drinks I've handed out," replied MacBride. "No use, Kennedy. Beat it, all of you. You're cluttering up the station."

The outer door opened and a man strolled in nonchalantly smoking a cork-tipped cigarette.

He was of medium height, slight in build, dressed in the acme of fashion. He wore a gray suit that could not have been made for less than a hundred dollars, a cream-colored silk shirt, a blue tie, and a rakish Panama hat. He carried a Malacca stick, and now he leaned on it, his hand aglitter with diamonds, a lazy, indolent look in his slitted brown eyes.

"Hello, MacBride," he droned through lips that scarcely moved.

"Aren't you late for tea, Duke?" asked the captain.

"Kind of. But I heard you've been shooting the town up. Where's the catch?"

"Rehearsing. No public showing just yet, Duke."

"Forget it. I got a right to a private interview."

MacBride shook his head. "That's a lot of noise. You've got no rights at all so far as I'm concerned. The door's behind you, Duke. The air'll do you good."

Duke Manola snarled, "Can that tripe, Mac. I didn't come out here to chin with you. I came out to see who you picked up. Cut the comedy!"

"Soft pedal, Duke. You're in bad company right now."

"Why, damn your soul, MacBride!—"

"Shut up!" barked the hard captain. "You might be a big guy in other circles, but just now, as far as I'm concerned, you're only a little dago shooting off a lot of hot air." He stepped to the outer door and yanked it open. "Now get the hell out!"

Manola's lips moved in a silent oath, and his eyes flamed behind lids that were almost closed. Then he shrugged. "All right, MacBride. Have your way. I see you're not tamed yet."

"Not by a damned sight, Duke!"

"Maybe—I'll try a little more—taming." With that he sauntered out, a leer on his dark, smooth face.

A moment later the newspapermen followed.

From then on until midnight MacBride sat in his office, behind locked doors, and raked Devore with a merciless third degree. But Devore only taunted him. He made no confession. He gave no details. He weathered the gale with the hardness of his kind, and at midnight MacBride, worn and haggard, torn inwardly by emotions that he never revealed, called it a day.

"All right, Devore. That'll do for tonight. More later, buddy."

He called in a policeman and directed him to put Devore in a cell.

"Listen here, MacBride," the gangster protested on the way out of the office. "I want a lawyer. I want him mighty quick."

"Dry up. You're not getting out on bail while I'm alive."

Still protesting, Devore was dragged away to a cell.

Weary, sunk at heart, MacBride slumped back in his chair, his chin dropping to his chest, his tousled hair straggling down over his red-rimmed eyes. He was up against it. He dared not look ahead. There was no telling what the morrow would bring. But one thing was certain. His daughter would be drawn into the net, linked with a gangster's crime, her name and likeness published throughout the country. Judith MacBride, daughter of Captain MacBride, feared by the criminal element of Richmond City. A stickler for the law. A hard man against crooks. Possessed of an enviable record.

He shuddered; the whole, big-boned frame of him shuddered.

And then the telephone rang, and he picked up the receiver.

"Is this you, Steve?" came his wife's anxious voice.

"Yes, Ann."

"Steve! I don't know where Judith is. She went to a movie tonight—to—forget for a little while. She'd promised to go with Elsie, from the other end of town. You know the show's out at eleven. And she hasn't come home yet. I called up Elsie and she said they parted in front of the theatre at eleven and Judith started walking home.

"And Steve, listen. At about ten some woman called up and asked for Judith. I said she wasn't in, that she'd gone to the movies. Then she hung up. What do you suppose could have happened?"

Under the desk, MacBride's clenched fist pounded against his knee.

"I don't know, Ann. But don't worry. I'll be home right away. Don't worry, dear. I'll—be— home."

The color had drained from his face by the time he slipped the receiver back on to the hook. He sat back, his arms outstretched, the hands knotted on the edge of the desk, the eyes wide and staring into space. And then the eyes narrowed and the lips curled.

He heaved up, banged on his cap and strode out of the station. When he reached home his wife was sobbing, and she came to his arms. Hard hit as he was, he, nevertheless, put his arms around her and patted her gently.

"Buck up, Ann. That's a brave girl. Maybe it's nothing after all. Maybe—"

The ringing of the telephone bell interrupted him. Slowly, he approached the instrument, unhooked the receiver.

"Who is this?" grated a voice.

"MacBride."

"Get wise to yourself, MacBride. You see that Devore gets free by tomorrow midnight, or your daughter gets a dirty deal. This is straight. The gang's got her at a hide-out you'll never find. I'm calling from a booth in the railroad station. By tomorrow midnight, MacBride, or your daughter gets the works! Good-bye!"

A click sounded in MacBride's ear. He turned away from the telephone, met his wife's wide-eyed stare.

"Steve! Steve!" she cried.

"Judith's been kidnapped by Devore's gang. Devore's the man I've got in jail. His freedom is their price—for Judith."

"Oh—dear—God!"

Ann MacBride closed her eyes and swayed. The hard captain caught her, held her gently, carried her to a sofa and laid her down, kneeling beside her.

For the first time in his life MacBride prayed—for his daughter.

8

Next day he sat in his office, with the doors bolted, and Ted Kerr facing him.

"Ted, I'm cornered," he muttered. "I've got to pay through the nose."

"The skunks!" exclaimed Kerr. "God, can't we comb the city? Can't we run the pups down?"

"It would take two or three days. They demand Devore by midnight. I've got to swallow my pride and let him go."

"But, Cap, you can't let him just walk out."

"I know I can't. There must be another way. He must escape."

Kerr bit his lip, perplexed. "Escape? Can you imagine the razzing you'll get?"

MacBride nodded. "Yes, more than you can. I've been called a tough nut, Ted. Well, I won't deny it. And my pride's been one of the biggest things in me. Swallowing it will damn near choke me. But my daughter—my flesh and blood—is the price, and, by God, I can't stand the blow!"

"But can't it be fixed so the blame'll fall on me? Hell, Cap, you've got so much more at stake."

"No. I'm the guy pays through the nose. Devore must escape."

"What about those birds at the Blue River?"

"They're not in the know. I hauled Donnegan off last night. Devore was just their bootlegger. Hinkle came across. He said Devore warned him to close his trap and keep it closed, or wind up wrestling with a bullet. No, there's no alternative. Sometime tonight I've got to pull a bone-head move and let Devore blow. Afterwards, Ted, I'll clean him out. But Judith comes first."

"Suppose they double-cross you?"

"I'll take care of that before Devore goes."

The day dragged by, and at nine that night MacBride had Devore brought in from the cell. He dismissed the officer with a nod. Devore sat down—he was without manacles—and helped himself to a cigarette from a pack on the desk. He needed a shave, and he looked down at the mouth—and nasty.

"What a crust you've got, MacBride! Dammit, I want a lawyer. I want to see something besides polished buttons. I gotta right to that, MacBride."

MacBride rocked gently in his swivel chair. "Pipe down. And listen. You're going to slide out of here tonight."

Devore looked up, suspecting a trick. "What d' you mean?"

"The rats you run with kidnapped my daughter last night. Their price is—your freedom. They've got me buffaloed, and I know they'd slit her open if I didn't come across."

"Told you I'd get you tied by the heels."

"Shut up. It's a bum break, and I'm not yapping. You slide out tonight."

Devore looked around. "Which way?"

"Not yet, buddy. You're going to call up your gang and tell 'em to let my daughter go."

"Do you see any green on me, Cap?" snarled Devore.

"You can take my word or leave it. I've never framed a guy yet, Devore. You ought to know that. Here's my proposition. You call up your gang and tell 'em it's all fixed. They let my kid go. You breeze. I'll give you twelve hours' grace. But after that I'm going after you. I'll know what number you call up, so don't hang around there after you're out. You're getting a lease on life, a twelve hours' lease. Grab it before I change my mind."

Devore leaned forward, his luminous eyes roving over the captain's face.

"Call Northside 412," he breathed.

MacBride reached for the telephone and put through the call. When he heard the operator ringing, he passed the phone over to Devore and watched him intently.

"Hell—hello," snapped Devore. "This you, Jake?… Yeah, this is Chuck. It's all fixed. Let the dame go—right away. Put her in a taxi and send her home. Then clear out and I'll meet you at Charlie's… Of course, I mean it. For God's sake, don't act dumb!… Yeah, right away. S' long."

He hung up, his eyes narrowed. "Now, MacBride!"

MacBride pulled open a drawer and laid an automatic on the desk. "The gun you shot Joe Manola with. It's empty. You grab it and cover me and beat it out the back way, through the lots, and run for three blocks. There's a main drag there, and a bus goes through to the city in five minutes."

Devore grabbed the gun, his eyes brilliant in their deep sockets, his lips drawn tight.

"Paying through the nose, eh, MacBride?"

"Shut up. When I meet you again, Devore, I won't be taking any prisoners. The morgue bus will gather up the remains. Breeze!"

Devore snapped to his feet, leered, and sped out through the rear door. MacBride sat still, his face granite hard, his fingers opening and closing, his teeth grinding together. For two minutes he sat there. Then he jumped up, ran to the door leading into the rear hall and banged it shut.

He spun around and dived for the door leading into the central room. Sergeant Haley was playing solitaire. Kerr was sitting at a table playing checkers with Kennedy, of the *Free Press*.

"Snap on it!" barked MacBride. "Devore's escaped! He pulled a fast one. Grabbed a gun lying on the desk. Come on!"

Kerr kicked back his chair. Two patrolmen came running from another room, drew their nightsticks.

MacBride led the way out, and on the street said, "We'll split." He directed the patrolmen to head for the trolley line. To Kerr he said, "We'll watch the bus line."

A moment later he and Kerr were running for the bus line, and when they reached the highway, MacBride pointed to a red light just disappearing around a bend.

"That's the bus," he said. "And Devore."

"So you did it, Cap."

"Hell, yes!"

9

An hour later, MacBride and Kerr stopped in at the captain's house. Judith was weeping in her mother's arms and her mother was shedding tears of happiness.

"Judith just came in," she said.

MacBride took his daughter and stood her up, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Poor kid—poor kid. Now tell me, Judith, tell me—all you know."

Ted Kerr stood a little back, ill at ease.

"Oh, daddy, I've been a fool—a little fool. When I was walking home from the movies last night that girl drove up in a car, called to me— and then two men jumped for me, gagged me, and they drove off."

"What girl?"

"Arline Kane. I met her a month ago at a hairdressing parlor in the city. She said she was an actress, and marveled at my hair. She said I ought to go on the stage. She took me to lunch, and then promised to introduce me to some theatrical men. She was going with a man named Devore. I met him several times, and then the other night we went to the Blue River and there was another fellow—for me. Mr. Manola. I—I didn't like him. He—he drank too much.

"When we drove away from the Blue River, he wanted to park on a dark road. But I didn't want him to. He was pretty drunk, and he wanted to make love to me. I fought him off, and then he turned to the others and said, 'I thought you said I'd find a good time.' And Mr. Devore said, 'Don't crab, Joe. Drive on.' And

Mr. Manola said, 'Nothing doing. I've got a mind to make you all walk. Go on, get out, all of you.' Well, he meant it, and he was pretty angry, too. And Mr. Devore got angry. They began swearing. Then Mr. Manola said, "You *will* get out, all of you!' And he drew his gun. But Mr. Devore, who was sitting in the back, jumped on him, and the gun went off, but it was twisted around so that the bullet struck Mr. Manola.

"He screamed, and then he shouted, 'I'll wreck all of you!' He seemed crazy, and threw into gear, and the car started. Then Mr. Devore yelled, 'Jump! We'll have to jump!' And we all did. And the car gathered speed, and Mr. Manola must have fainted, because it swerved to right and left and then hit a tree.

"We fled through the woods, after I'd gone to the wreck to see if he was alive. But he wasn't. Then Mr. Devore told me to say nothing about what had happened. He threatened that if I did he'd wipe out my whole family. That's why I wouldn't tell you, dad. I've been terrible—a fool—a fool!"

"Yes, you have," agreed MacBride. "But did Devore and Manola talk about—well, business?"

Judith thought; then, "No. But I remember, at the Blue River, when Arline and I had come back to the table from the ladies' room, Mr. Devore was saying to Mr. Manola, 'And they think hooch is being made there! A good blind!" And then he laughed.'

MacBride stepped back, stroking his jaw. Judith threw Kerr an embarrassed look, but he came to her and took her hand. "It's all right, Judith. I'm awfully glad you're safe."

"I've been awful, Ted. And yet you're so kind." Feeling his arm about her, she laid her head on his shoulder. "I'll never—never do it again, Ted—never."

MacBride clipped suddenly, "Ted, I've got a hunch. That brewery. I wonder if something besides beer and hooch is being made there."

Kerr looked up from Judith. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to find out. Come on."

Leaving Judith, Kerr flicked her cheek with his lips, and she pressed his hand.

But MacBride was calling him, and he hurried out at the captain's heels. They strode back to the station, and MacBride hauled out Donnegan and the police car.

"Drive to that old brewery," he clipped.

He sat back beside Kerr and lit a fresh cigar.

Kerr said, "I thought the orders were to lay off that place?"

"I said I'd lay off if they were busting the Volstead Act. But I've got a hunch something else is going on there."

"What, Cap?"

"That's what I'm going to find out. Shoot, Donnegan!"

Donnegan nodded, and as the car moved away from the curb, there were running feet on the sidewalk, and a moment later Kennedy was riding on the running-board.

"Mind if I tag along, Mac?" he grinned.

"You're like a burr in a man's sock, Kennedy. But get in beside Donnegan."

"What's the lay, Mac?"

"Stick around and see if you can find out. Here's a cigar. See if that'll keep your jaw shut."

"Thanks, Mac. Only I'm sore as hell that you didn't tell me beforehand it was Devore you had. Cripes, won't they hand you the razzberry! I shot the story right in. I said you were sitting with Devore alone in your office, with the automatic lying on the desk. You were trying to make him swear it was his gun, and in the heat of the argument Devore grabbed it and covered you. I had to make up a lot of fiction, but that was because you didn't explain. I ended up by saying that you were sure you'd recapture him, and all that sort of boloney."

"That's as good as anything," muttered MacBride. "Now jam that cheroot in your mouth and sign off."

Twenty minutes later they were driving along Farmingville Turnpike. The night was dark, and within the past ten minutes a chill Autumn drizzle had started, the kind of drizzle that is half rain and half mist—penetrating and clammy. The rubber tires hissed sibilantly on the wet macadam, and the beams of the headlights were reflected back from the gray vapor.

Presently Donnegan slowed down and swung in close to the side of the road, extinguished the lights.

"Can't you drive into the bushes?" asked MacBride. "We ought to get the car off the road and out of sight."

Donnegan tried this and succeeded. Then they all got out and stood in a group.

MacBride said, "We'll walk up. There's a lane a hundred yards on, leading into the brewery, which is a quarter of a mile off the Turnpike. You," he said to Kennedy, "better stay out of this."

"Try and do it, Mac. I didn't come out here to pick wildflowers."

MacBride growled, turned and plowed through the bushes. The others followed, and in short time they reached the lane. It led through vacant fields, fenced in, where in the old days horses belonging to the brewing company had grazed.

"Here comes a machine!" warned Kerr, and they dived into the tall grass by the fence.

Two beams of light danced through the gloom. The machine was bound in from the Turnpike, and presently it purred by—a big, opulent limousine. When its tail light had disappeared behind a bend, MacBride stood up, motioned to the others, and proceeded. The visor on his cap was beaded with the drizzle.

Gradually the buildings loomed against the blue-black sky—the big main plant, surrounded by stables and storehouses. Not a light could be seen. They reached the first outbuilding, and from where he stood MacBride could see a half-dozen automobiles parked near the main building, by the loading platform. Here and there he saw a faint red glow near the machines.

"Chauffeurs, smoking," he decided, and his gaze wandered up the dark face of the big three-storied building, which an ancient brewing company had evacuated three years ago.

"Something phony going on there, or I don't know my tricks," remarked Kennedy.

"Guess this is the time you do," replied MacBride. "Let's work around to the rear."

They retraced their steps a short distance and then began creeping around the outside of the building, weaving through tall grass and dried-out weeds. Ten minutes later they were at the off-side of the main building, deep in shadows. MacBride found a window with broken panes, nodded to the others, and

crawled through. He dropped a few feet into a chill, damp cellar, black as pitch; stood waiting while Kerr, Kennedy and then Donnegan, followed.

"Your flash, Donnegan," he whispered, and felt the cylinder pressed into his hand.

He snapped on the light. The beam leaped through the clammy gloom, shone on stacks of dusty kegs, long out of use, and on stacks of bottles musty with cobwebs. The odor of must and mold seeped into the men's nostrils.

MacBride led the way, winding in and out between the rows of barrels. Further on he came to a small, heavy door which, swinging open under his hand, led into another section of the cellar. Here were more barrels, but they were standing upright, and the smell of new wine was prevalent. Barrels of it. Kennedy licked his lips, then pointed ahead.

The beam of light swung back and forth across stacked cases of liquor. The men crept closer.

"Hot diggity!" whispered Kennedy. "Look at the Dewar's, and the Sandy MacDonald. And— say!… Three Star Hennessy!"

"Pipe down!" snapped MacBride under his breath.

"Maybe you got a bum steer after all, Mac. If it's only liquor, and you dragged me all the way out here—"

"Nobody dragged you out here, Kennedy! Quit yapping!"

"I know, but—"

Bang! Bang!

Kerr tensed and his breath shot out with— "What's that?"

Bang! Bang!

MacBride had his gun out, his lips pursed, his eyes looking up toward the unseen regions above.

"One thing," he muttered. "It's not just target practice. Come on!"

10

Four shots, muffled by floors and walls but, nevertheless, somewhere in that building.

MacBride, with his flash sweeping around furiously, finally located a staircase that led up to the ground floor. At his heels came Kerr, trailed closely by Donnegan and Kennedy. MacBride paused to get his bearings.

Another shot rang out, echoes trailing, commingled with the sounds of banging doors and the shouts of men.

"This way!" clipped MacBride, espying another stairway.

He ascended two steps at a time, reached the next landing. He looked up into the gloom above just in time to see a slash of gun-fire rip through the darkness. In the sudden flare he saw a man with hands upthrown. Then there was a thumping sound, as the man fell.

MacBride's flash was out. His lips were set. He whispered to his men, "Watch it, boys! This place is a death trap! Stick close!"

A sudden exchange of shots burst out on the floor above, and the rebound of bullets could be heard intermingled with screaming oaths and pounding feet. Then, nearby, MacBride heard a body hurtling down the stairs. He jumped in that direction, caught a man in

the act of scrambling to his feet. Heaving up, the man struck out and the barrel of a revolver whanged by MacBride's cheek and stopped against his shoulder.

MacBride struck back with his own thirty-eight and landed it on the stranger's skull. Then Donnegan was there to help him, gripping the man's arms from behind. They dragged him down the hall, felt their way into a room, and then MacBride snapped on his flash and looked at their catch.

It was the bull-necked red-head whom he had seen in Devore's hide-out in Jockey Street. The man was streaked with blood.

"What the hell are you doing here?" MacBride wanted to know.

"Playin' Santy Claus—"

"Cut out the wisecracks! What's going on upstairs?"

"Go up an' find out. Go on. Slugs are sailin' around up there like flies in the summer time."

"I'll tend to you later," bit off MacBride; and to Donnegan, "Get out your bracelets and clamp him to the water pipe on the wall."

This done, MacBride again led the way back up the hall. As they reached the foot of the staircase leading to the floor, they partly heard, vaguely saw, a knot of men milling down the steps.

MacBride squared off and pressed on his flash.

"Good cripes almighty!" exploded one of the men.

"As you are!" barked MacBride.

The man in the lead was carrying a canvas bag. The man was Chuck Devore, and behind him were six others. One of these snapped up his gun and fired. The shot smashed MacBride's flashlight, tore through his left hand that held it. He cursed and reeled sidewise, and Kerr's gun boomed close by his ear, and the slug ripped through the gang on the stair.

"Back up!" one of them called to his companions.

MacBride thrust his wounded hand into his pocket and fired at them.

"Come on!" he snapped, and leaped up the staircase.

Kerr passed him on the way up, and let fly with three fast shots. A gangster crumpled near the top, spun around and came crashing down. He reeled off MacBride and pitched over the railing. At the top, a gun spat and a bullet grazed Kerr's cheek, leaving a hot sting. Then they were on the top floor.

In a close exchange of shots Kennedy gasped and clutched at his left arm, and Donnegan stopped short, his legs sagging. His gun dropped from his hand and he crumpled. MacBride stumbled over him and sprayed the gloom with three shots. A man screamed and another flung out a bitter stream of oaths that died in a groan. MacBride plugged ahead, reeling over prone bodies, himself dazed with the pain of his wounded arm.

He saw a square of the night sky framed in a window, saw it blocked suddenly by a figure that stepped out to a fire-escape. The figure twisted and a slash of gun-fire stabbed the darkness. MacBride's cap was carried from his head. His own gun belched and the man in the window doubled over and fell back into the hall.

Then he brought up short, looked out and saw, vaguely, a couple of automobiles tearing away into the night. He spun around,

expecting another enemy, but a dread pall had descended after that last shot. Kerr limped up to him, panting. Kennedy was swearing softly. MacBride snapped on his own flash and saw them, bloody and torn; Kerr with a gash on his cheek, Kennedy slowly sopping a wound in his arm. The beam picked out dead bodies on the floor. He swayed back and bent over Donnegan, then stood up, wagging his head.

"I'll never say, 'Shoot, Donnegan,' again," he muttered.

His light swung around and settled on the man he had shot by the window. It was Devore, still gripping the canvas bag. MacBride bent down and opened the bag, and saw a mass of bills—fives, tens, twenties. He gave the bag to Kerr, and moved on toward a door. He threw his light in here and saw a large, square room whose expensive furnishings were in ruin. He espied a light switch and pressed the button, and a big chandelier sprang to life.

"Hot diggity!" exclaimed Kennedy.

Dead men were here, too. But what had caused Kennedy's exclamation was the gambling layout. There was a roulette wheel. There was a faro table. There were a half dozen card tables, two of them overturned. There were cards and chips spread over the floor. The windows were covered by heavy curtains, and ventilators were in the ceiling.

"My hunch was right," nodded MacBride, bitterly.

"And look who's here!" cried Kennedy. "Duke Manola—dead as a doornail. And—oh, boy!—the late Judge Mike Haggerty—*late* is right. Where," he yelled, looking around, "oh, where is a telephone? What a scoop!"

There was a shot below, and MacBride whirled. He dived out into the hall, with Kerr at his heels, and went down the stairway on the fly. His flash leaped forth and spotted two figures running for the lower staircase.

"Stop!" he shouted.

His answer was a shot that went wild. But MacBride fired as he ran, and saw one of the figures topple. He kept going, furiously, and collided with the other.

"All right, Cap. You've got me."

His flash shone on the face of a woman. The man lying dead on the floor was the redhead.

11

"Well," said MacBride, "who are you?"

"Arline Kane, and what about it?"

"No lip, sister. What are you doing here?"

She laughed—a hard little laugh. "Came in to look around. I heard the fireworks from the road. I found Red tied to a pipe and I shot away the nice little bracelet."

"You come upstairs," directed MacBride, and shoved her toward the staircase.

Once in the hidden gambling den, Arline stood with her hands on her hips and looked around with lazy eyes.

"Hell," she said, "what a fine mess. Real wild West stuff. Jesse James and his boy scouts were pikers alongside these playboys. Well, there's Duke, the bum. Good thing."

"What do you mean?" asked MacBride.

She sat down and lit a cigarette. “Don’t know, eh? Well, Duke used to be my boy friend, until he got hot over a little flapper not dry behind the ears yet. Gave me my walking papers. That was after he tried to frame Chuck Devore, and Chuck breezed for a while. But when Chuck came back, I looked him up and we consolidated our grudge against the wop.

“We got one good break. Duke and his kid brother were on the outs. The kid wanted more money, but Duke was nobody’s fool. He told Joe where he got off. I understand they actually came to blows. Well, it was about that time I met Joe, and like a kid he handed me his sob story about Duke landing on him.

“I got him tight one night and he sprung his tongue for a fare-ye-well. Told me about Duke buying this brewery to make and store booze. But some politicians, and Diamond Jack Winslow—laying there, with the busted neck—were behind him. Diamond Jack installed the games here and Haggerty was to get a thirty percent split from Jack on the house winnings. Duke had some money in it, but he was mainly for the booze end. Haggerty promised protection, and Duke, in payment, promised three thousand votes for Haggerty’s party.

“Well, Duke’s kid brother was hard up for money, and Duke would never let him run with the gang. So Chuck and I got the kid one night and put it up to him: He could clean up by raiding this dump, by tipping us off when the games were running high. Then the other night, he got drunk and sore and—”

“Pulled a bone,” put in MacBride, “on Old Stone Road. I know all about that. And then tonight Devore and his rats thought they’d pull a fast one—do what we’d least expect after their first fumble—jump this joint and clean out before we’d caught our breath. Well, they would have fooled me, sister. I *didn’t* expect them. I came here on a hunch to look around, and found fireworks. And you—you’re the last one.”

“Out of luck again,” she nodded.

“You could make some money,” put in Kennedy, “writing a series of articles for the *Evening News* on ‘How I Went Wrong.’”

“You would say that, ink fingers,” she gave him, derisively. “But I’ll do no writing. And because I’m the last straggler, I’ll take no rap.” She bit off the end of her cigarette and flung the other part away with a defiant gesture. “A pill was in the tip. Always carried one for just a tough break like this.” Her eyes were glazed. “Not lilies, boys… something red… roses.”

A day later MacBride sat at his desk in the station, his cap tipped back, one eye squinted against the smoke from his cigar while he read the *Free Press’* account of last night’s holocaust. Sometimes he wagged his head, amazed at remarks which he was alleged to have made.

The city was shocked to the core. Election possibilities had turned more than one somersault during the past twelve hours. Big officials were making charges and counter charges. And MacBride, with his hunch, was mainly responsible for it.

He looked up to see Kennedy standing in the doorway. He put down the paper and leaned back. Kennedy’s arm, like his own, was in a sling.

“Greetings, Mac. No end of greetings.” He wandered in and slid down on a chair. “How do you like the writeup I gave you?”

“You’re a great liar, Kennedy.”

“Well, hell, I had to make up a lot of goofy stuff, sure. What’s the biggest lie, Mac?”

"Where the account says, 'Captain MacBride, having received a tip from an unidentified person, probably a stoolie, that a certain gang was planning to raid the near-beer plant on Farmingville Turnpike last night, immediately drove out to forestall any such attempt.'" He jabbed the paper with a rigid forefinger. "That's the part, Kennedy."

Kennedy shrugged. "Yeah, you're right. When I got back to the office and wrote the thing up, I wondered how you *had* got the tip. Well, I was in a hurry, so I wrote in that—just that. It sounded all right, fitted all right—and look here, Mac. It just about cinches any chance of the big guns bawling you out. You were tipped off by a stoolie—a phone call—no name. You shot out there and the raid was under way. What developed later was not your fault. It's air tight!"

MacBride creaked his chair forward, sighed, and drew a bottle and glasses from his desk. He set them down.

"Have a drink, Kennedy."

Kennedy edged nearer the desk and, arching a weary eyebrow, poured himself a stiff three fingers. MacBride poured himself a drink, and leaned back with it.

"Kennedy," he said, "there have been times when I ached to wring your neck. You're a cynical, cold-blooded, snooping, wisecracking example of modern newspaperdom. But, Kennedy, you've got brains—and you're on the square. Here's to you."

Kennedy grinned in his world-weary way. "Boloney, Mac. No matter how you slice it, it's still boloney," he said.

The Law Laughs Last

Frederick Nebel

Captain MacBride and organized crime have a showdown

1

TOUGH PRECINCT was the Second of Richmond City, lying in the backyard of the theatrical district and on the frontier of the railroad yards. A hard-boiled precinct, touching the fringes of crookdom's elite on the north—the con men, the night-club barons; and on the south, the dim-lit, crooked alleys traversed by the bum, the lush-worker and poolroom gangster. On the north were the playhouses, the white way, high-toned apartments, opulent hotels, high hats, evening gowns. On the south, tenements, warehouses, cobblestones, squalor, and the railroad yards. The toughest precinct in all Richmond City.

Captain MacBride, back again in the Second, ran it with two fists, a dry sense of humor and a generous quantity of brass-bound nerve. He was a lean, windy-eyed man of forty. He had a wife and an eighteen-year-old daughter in a vine-clad bungalow out in suburban Grove Manor, and having acquired early in life a suspicion that he was going to die young and violently in the line of duty, he had forthwith taken out a lot of life insurance. He was not a pessimist, but a hardheaded materialist, and he rated crooks and gun-men with a certain species of rodent that travels by dark and frequents cellars, sewers and garbage dumps.

He was sitting in his office at the station house a mild spring night, going over a sheaf of police bulletins, when Kennedy, of the *Free Press*, strolled in.

"Spring has come, Mac," Kennedy yawned.

"Why don't you set it to poetry?"

"I got over that years ago." He drifted over to the desk, helped himself to a cigar from an open box, sniffed it critically. "Dry," he muttered.

"I like 'em dry."

"I always keep mine moist."

MacBride chuckled. "That's rich! First time I see you smoking a cigar of your own I'll buy you a box of Montereys. Well, what's on your mind?"

Kennedy looked toward the open window through which came the blare and beat of a jazz band muffled by distance.

"That," he said.

MacBride nodded. "I thought so. I'll bet if something doesn't bust loose over there you'll get down-hearted."

Kennedy shrugged, sank wearily to a chair and lit up. "And I'll bet you're happy as hell they're staging that political block-party. You look it, Mac."

"Don't I!" muttered MacBride, a curl to his lip. "Yes, Kennedy, I'm happy as a school kid when vacation time comes. Of all the dumb stunts I can think of, this block-party takes the cake. If this night passes without somebody getting bumped off, I'll get pie-eyed drunk and take a calling-down from my wife. A political campaign in Richmond City makes a Central American rebellion look comical."

"And how!" grinned Kennedy. "But I only hope Krug and Bedell get kicked out of office so hard they'll never get over it. As State's Attorney, Krug's made a fortune, and Alderman Johnny Bedell's his right-hand man. I'm all for Anderson for State's Attorney and Connaught for alderman of this district. They're square. But I wouldn't be willing to bet on the outcome. The Mayor and his crowd are behind Krug.

"And here's the nigger in the woodpile. Connaught and Anderson are square men. They deserve to get in office. But there's a gang in this city that's taken it into their own hands to make things hot as hell for Krug and Bedell, and by doing this they're going to cramp the Anderson-Connaught square style. Connaught and Anderson don't want their support, but they've got to take it—through the nose, too."

"Say who you mean, Kennedy," broke in MacBride. "Come on and tell me you mean Duveen and his guns."

"Sure—Duveen. Duveen hasn't got a good break since Krug's been State's Attorney. But who has? Simple, Bonelio, the S.A.'s friend. And Bonelio is sure tooting his horn for the Krug-Bedell ticket. If Anderson gets in for State's Attorney he'll put a wet blanket on Bonelio's racket; and if Anderson sweeps Connaught in with him, it'll mean that Bonelio's warehouses this side of the railroad yards will be swept clean.

"And that's what Duveen wants, because he wants to run the bootleg racket in Richmond City, and so long as Bonelio has the present State's Attorney and the alderman for this district on his side, Duveen's blocked. What a hell of a riot this election is going to be!"

MacBride grunted, opened a drawer and pulled out a bottle of Three Star Hennessy.

"Have a drink, Kennedy," he said. "There are times when I'd like to kick you in the slats, but I admire your brains and the way you get the low-down on things."

Through the window came another burst of dance music. On Jackson Street couples were dancing, political banners were flying, ropes of

colored lights were glowing. And policemen were on the walkout, idly swinging nightsticks, watching, waiting, prepared for the worst and hoping for the best.

MacBride lit a cigar and looked up to find Detective Moriarity standing in the doorway.

" 'Lo, cap. 'Lo, Kennedy." Moriarity was a slim, compactly built young man, short on speech, quick in action—one-time runner-up for the welterweight title.

"How do things look?" asked MacBride.

"Depends," said Moriarity. "Committeeman Shanz is a little tight. Bedell ain't there yet. Shanz expects him, though. Says Bedell's's'posed to speak at eleven."

"See any bums?"

"No. But pipe this. I just been tipped off that a crowd of Anderson-Connaught sympathizers from the Fourth Ward are making a tour of the town. About ten machines. Band and flags and all that crap. I figure this way. Ten to one all o' them have got some booze along, to make 'em feel better. They're mostly storekeepers and automobile dealers, but if they get tight they'll get gay. Like as not they'll wind up at the block-party and some wiseguy will haul off and talk outta turn."

MacBride doubled his fist and took a crack at the desk. "Just about that, Jake! All right. Get back on the job. Cohen with you?"

"Yeah, Ike's over there. Patrolmen Gunther and Holstein at one end the street. McClusky and Swanson the other. Things are running smooth so far. Don't see any o' Duveen's guns, or Bonelio's."

"That," said MacBride, "is what itches me. Bonelio ought to be there. He's Shanz's friend."

"He's not there. None of his guns, either. Tell you who is there, though, cap."

"Who?"

"Bonelio's skirt. That little wren he yanked from the burlesque circuit and shoved in his ritzy night-club on Paradise Street. Trixie Meloy. Ask me and I'll crack she still oughter be back in burlesque, and third rate at that."

"Who's she with?"

"Alone. High-hatting everybody. But she sticks close to Shanz."

"I got it!" clipped MacBride. "She's waiting for somebody, for Bonelio. Watch her, Jake. It's ten-thirty now. Bonelio should have been on hand long ago. He shows up at all of the district's balls and dances. Until he comes anything can happen. Tell the cops to keep their eyes open. Tell Cohen to tend to business and quit trying to date up the gals. I know Ike. On the way out tell the sergeant to see the reserves are ready for a break. First time you pipe a Duveen gun on the scene, run him off. If he cracks wise, bring him over here.

"Remember, Jake, this precinct is just about as safe as a volcano. We've heard rumblings for the past month, and God knows when the top'll blow off. It's a tough situation. I'm all for the Anderson-Connaught ticket, as you know, but no rat like Duveen is going to get away with anything. He doesn't give a damn for the Anderson-Connaught combine. He's sore at the present State's Attorney and the greaseball Bonelio. Both of them ought to be in the pen, and before this election is over I've got a hunch one of them will be—if he doesn't get bumped off during the rush. On your way, Jake, and good luck."

Moriarity went out.

Kennedy said, “I’m going over and look around, too, Mac.”

“You smell headlines for tomorrow’s *Press*, don’t you?”

“Yeah—the city of dreadful night. Hell, man, we ain’t had a good hot story since that Dutch butcher tapped his frau on the knob with a meat ax. Years ago, Mac, old bean!”

“Two weeks ago last night,” mused MacBride. “Ah-r-r, when will this crime wave stop? Wives killing husbands; husbands killing wives! College kids going in for suicide and double death pacts! Men braining little kids! Men willing to kill to get power!”

“That,” said Kennedy, pausing in the doorway, “is what keeps the circulation of the daily tabloids on top. See you later.”

Alone, MacBride stared into space for a long moment, his eyes glazed with thought. Then he sighed bitterly, flung off the mood with a savage little gesture, and continued looking over the collection of police bulletins.

Fifteen minutes dragged by. The dusty-faced clock on the wall ticked them off with hollow monotony.

Then the telephone rang.

MacBride picked up the receiver, said, “Hello.”

“MacBride?”

“Yup.”

“Bedell’s slated to get the works tonight.”

The instrument clicked.

“Hello—hello!” barked MacBride.

There was no use. The man behind the mysterious voice had hung up. MacBride rang the operator, gave his name.

“Trace that call,” he snapped. “Fast!”

2

He pressed one of a series of buttons on his desk. The door opened. Lieutenant Donnelly tramped in wiping the cobwebs of a recent nap from his eyes.

“On your toes, lieutenant!” cracked MacBride. “Just got a blind call that Bedell’s going to get bumped off. You’ll take charge here tonight while I’m on the outside.”

The telephone rang. MacBride reached for it, said, “Yes?” A moment later he hung up, snorted with disappointment. “Call was from a booth in the railroad terminal.”

“Who d’ you suppose it was, captain?” ventured Donnelly.

“How the hell do I know?” MacBride was on his feet, buttoning his coat. He reached for his visored cap, but changed his mind and slapped on a flap-brimmed fedora.

“I’ll be over on Jackson Street,” he told Donnelly crisply. “Bedell’s supposed to pull a campaign speech at eleven. I’ll put the clamps on that. Bedell’s no friend of mine, but I’m damned if any bum is going to kill him in my precinct. If Headquarters wants me, give ‘em the dope and tell ‘em where I am.”

He strode into the central room and shot brief orders to the desk sergeant. Then he drafted four policemen from the reserve room. They came out buttoning their coats, nightsticks drawn. The lieutenant, the sergeant, the four policemen—all were affected by the vigor, the

spirit with which MacBride dived into the middle of things. No captain liked more to get out in the raw and the rough of crime than MacBride. The crack of his voice, the snap of his movement, made him a man whom others were eager to follow. Hard he was, but with the hardness of a man supremely capable of command. He had turned down a Headquarters job on the grounds that it was too soft—that he would stagnate and grow old before his time, grow whiskers and a large waistband.

He led the way out of the station house. His step was firm and resolute, and he carried himself with a definite air of determination. One block west, and two south, and they were at Jackson Street.

The band was playing a fox trot. The block was roped off at either end, and a hundred couples were dancing on the street pavement. On the sidewalks and the short stone flights before the tenement were a hundred-odd onlookers. Strung from pole to pole were rows of colored electric lights. Banners were waving; posters showing likenesses of Alderman Bedell and State's Attorney Krug emblazoned the houses and the poles. A temporary bandstand had been erected in the middle of the block, and from this, too, the candidates for re-election were expected to speak.

MacBride looked the place over critically. Detective Ike Cohen left a couple of girls to join the captain.

"Something up, Cap?"

"Maybe. See any old familiar faces around?"

"None that'd interest you. Here comes Moriarity."

At sight of the captain Moriarity frowned quizzically. "Huh?" he asked.

MacBride explained about the telephone call. Gunther and Holstein, the patrolmen stationed at that end of the block, mingled with the four reserves, all wondering what was in the wind.

"Where's Committeeman Shanz?" MacBride asked.

"I'll get him," said Moriarity, and faded into the crowd.

He reappeared in company with Shanz, district committeeman and chairman of the night's carnival. Shanz was a German-Jew, though he had more of the beer-garden look about him. A short, rotund man, beefy-cheeked and spectacled, with a jovial grin that was only skin deep.

"Well, well, captain," he boomed, waddling forward with his hand extended, "this is a pleasure."

MacBride shook and said, "Not so much, Shanz. You've got to bust up this picnic."

Shanz's grin faded. "How's this?"

"The ball is over," explained MacBride. "There's trouble brewing and it's liable to boil over any minute."

"But I got to make a speech," argued Shanz. "And Alderman Bedell is due here now." He looked at his watch. "He's going to make a speech, too."

"I don't give a damn! You're not going to broadcast and neither is Bedell. I tell you, Shanz, this block-party scheme is the bunk. It's the best way I know of to start a riot."

"Do you say that, heh, because you favor the opposition? Ha, I know where your sympathy lays, captain!"

"Don't be a fool! I just got a tip that Bedell's set to get bumped off, and it's not going to happen in my precinct."

Shanz leaned back and threw out his chest. "What is the police for? What are you for?"

"I've got a hunch I'm supposed to side-track crime. I'm no master mind, Shanz. I don't go in for solving riddles. I'm just a cop who tries to beat crime to the tape. Now don't stick out your belly and hand me an argument. I'm not in the mood."

Shanz was troubled. "I can't stop it. If I do that and Bedell can't make his speech he'll land on me. Wait till he comes. Talk to him. But I ain't going to call it off. We staged this so Bedell could make a speech."

MacBride, impatient, cracked fist into palm. "Cripes, I want to clear this crowd out before Bedell gets here! I told you he's not going to make a speech. I won't let him."

The dance number stopped. But from the distance came the sound of another band, with brass and drums in the majority. It drew nearer with the minutes, and then a string of cars appeared, flaunting banners that exalted the virtues of the Anderson-Connaught combine. Colored torches smoked from every machine, and the roving campaigners cheered their candidates lustily.

"What in hell is this?" roared Shanz, reddening.

"Competition," said MacBride.

The automobiles stopped, and the brass band attained new heights of noise commingled with the singing voices of the men. The carnival orchestra, not to be outdone, burst into action, hammering out a military march. The result was boisterous, maddening, and everybody began yelling.

The first symptoms of mob hysteria were apparent.

MacBride snapped quick orders to the policemen. "Chase this crowd! The dance is over!"

He pivoted sharply, set his jaw and plowed through the crowd on a beeline for the leaders of the parade.

"You move on!" he barked. "Come on, no stalling. Get out of here, and I mean now!"

"Aw, go fly a kite," came a bibulous retort. "Everybody havin' helluva good time. Who's all right? Hiram Anderson, the next State's Attorney's all right! Y-e-e-e-e!"

Others took up the cry. Somebody flung a bottle and it crashed against a house front, the glass spattering.

"Dammit," yelled MacBride, "you're starting a riot! Get a move on!"

One of the cars started moving. Others honked their horns. Many of the occupants had piled out and several of them, far gone with walloping liquor, hilarious as sailors on a spree, were trying to tear down the banners of the Krug-Bedell faction. The supporters of Alderman Bedell objected strenuously, and fists began flying about promiscuously. It was, now, anybody's and everybody's carnival. Admission fees were waived. The two bands continued to add to the din and clamor. The tempo of their combined efforts went far toward heightening the strain of hysteria that had taken hold of the mob. The streets were jammed with motor cars, and the horns honked and bleated.

Women screeched, and men began striking out without apparent provocation. The crowd surged this way and that, but never got anywhere. Nightsticks rapped more frequently on stubborn heads. Somebody heaved a brick

that crashed through an automobile windshield and knocked the man at the wheel unconscious. The machine swerved, bounded and banged head-on into a doorway.

"Good God Almighty!" groaned MacBride.

He plunged through the mob, fought, pounded, hammered his way to the big touring car that carried the musicians. He leaped to the running-board, wrenched a trombone from the player's hand.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "I'll cave in the next mouth that pulls another toot!"

He silenced them.

He turned and weaved toward the bandstand, and on the way ran into Alderman Bedell.

"Who started this, MacBride? What is it? What's going on?"

"What the hell does it look like, a May party?"

"Don't get sore—don't get sore!"

"Listen to me, Bedell!" MacBride gripped his arm hard. "You're no friend of mine, but I'm giving you a tip. Get out of here! Jump in your car, go home and lock all the doors. Some pup is out to get you!"

"He is, eh?" snarled Bedell, a big whale of a man with gimlet eyes. "Let him!"

"Don't be a blockhead all your life! I tell you, man, you're in danger!" A whiff of Bedell's breath told him the man had been drinking. Drink always made Bedell cocky, and he spoke best from a platform when he was moderately soaked.

"I'm going to d'liver a speech here tonight, MacBride—"

MacBride snorted with disgust and went on his way. He reached the bandstand and ripped the baton from the leader's hand. He kicked over the drum and shot out short, sizzling commands. He left a silenced bandstand.

The policemen had managed to club into submission the instigators of the riot. Swollen heads, black eyes and bruised jaws were in abundance. The best argument in a riot is a deftly wielded nightstick. A clout on the head is something a temporarily crazed man will understand.

The hysteria was dwindling. A dozen of the rioters were hastily escorted away from the scene by four policemen and taken to the station house. The crowd quieted, took a long breath generally, and waited.

MacBride climbed back upon the bandstand, rumbled the drum in plea for silence, and then raised his voice.

"Please, now, everybody go home!" he demanded. "The party is over. It's too bad, but nothing can be done." He waved his arms. "Clear out, everybody—now!"

A figure bulked at his elbow. It was that of Alderman Bedell, and before MacBride could get a word in edgewise, Bedell roared, "La-dies and gentlemen, it grieves me to see this sociable gathering break up because of the undignified actions of the hirelings—yes, hirelings, I say—of the party which is trying to drive me out of office. As alderman of this district, I want to say—I… ugh!"

He clapped a hand to his chest, swayed, then crumpled heavily at MacBride's feet.

"Heart attack," cried someone in the crowd.

MacBride knelt down, turned the alderman over, felt his chest, ran his hand inside the shirt. It came out stained with blood. Bedell twitched, stiffened, and was dead.

Cohen said over MacBride's shoulder, "Headlines, Mac, in the first edition. Hot diggity damn!"

3

An hour later MacBride stood spread-legged in his office at the station house. His coat was unbuttoned, his hair was tousled, and his lean cheeks looked a little drawn.

Among the others present were Committeeman Shanz, Trixie Meloy, Moriarity and Cohen, and the inevitable Kennedy. No one had been apprehended. No shot had been heard. Obviously a silencer had been used on the gun that sent Bedell to his death. Bedell's body was at the morgue being probed by the deputy medical examiner.

"Now look here, Miss Meloy," MacBride said. "You say you were standing on Jackson Street near Holly. You saw a man wearing a light gray suit and a gray cap drift down Holly, get into a car and drive off when Bedell was shot. Why didn't you yell out?"

"Does a lady go shoutin' out like that?" she retorted, tossing her peroxide bob. "Besides I didn't know what it was all about. I didn't know he was shot. I thought he fainted or something. I didn't connect the two up until I heard you yell he was killed. Then I thought of the other man."

"In that case, how does it happen you remember what he wore?"

"Well, I got an eye for nice clothes. He was dressed swell, that's why. A woman notices clothes more than a man does."

"Remember the car?"

"Not so good. It wasn't so near. It looked like a roadster."

"How about the man—besides his clothes?"

"I didn't see his face—only his back as he was walkin' away."

"I see. You're a friend of Tony Bonelio's, aren't you?"

"Yes. Antonio's a good friend of mine."

"My mistake. Antonio." He smiled drily. "How come Antonio wasn't at the dance with you?"

"He was at his night-club. I never seen a block party, so I come down to look it over. Mr. Shanz here invited me. He's a friend of Antonio's."

"Yes, that's right," put in Shanz.

"And listen," said Trixie, looking at her strap-watch. "I got to dance at the Palmetto Club tonight."

"All right, Miss Meloy. You run along. Keep in mind, though, that I may want to ask you more questions."

Shanz stood up. "I'll take Miss Meloy to the club in my car," he said.

"Suit yourself," shrugged MacBride. "Maybe this'll be a lesson to you about block parties."

"It cooks the Anderson-Connaught goose, too, captain," replied Shanz.

“Connaught’s a guy preaches a lot and then goes and hires gunmen.”

“Careful how you talk,” warned MacBride. “If it was a gunman of Connaught’s I’ll nail him. But I’ve got a hunch it wasn’t.”

“Then who was it?”

“If I could answer that right now, d’ you think I’d be losing a night’s sleep?”

“See you get him, anyhow. There’s lots o’ captains want this job here.”

“That’s my worry, Shanz, not yours.”

“Well, I’m just telling you, see you get him.”

“See you mind your own business, too.”

Shanz and Trixie Meloy went out.

MacBride opened his desk and passed around the Hennessy. He downed a stiff bracer himself and lit a fresh cigar.

“Cripes,” he chuckled grimly, “this’ll mean one awful jolt to Connaught. It’ll be hard to believe that the guy got Bedell wasn’t on Connaught’s payroll.”

“If,” said Moriarity, “we only knew who the guy was sent in that tip you got.”

“That’s the hitch, Jake,” nodded MacBride. “The guy who called up is the key to who killed Bedell.”

There was a knock on the door, and Officer Holstein looked in.

“Say, Cap, there’s a Polack out here wants to see you. He lives on Jackson Street.”

At a nod from MacBride, an old man came in, fumbling with his hat.

“Hello,” said the captain. “What’s your name?”

“Ma name Tikorsky. I got somet’in’ to tell. See, I live number’t’ree-twent’-one Jackson, up de top floor. I look out de window, watch de show, see. When de big fellar drop down, I hear”—he looked up at the ceiling—”I hear noise on de roof, like a man run, see.”

MacBride jerked up. “You heard a man run across the roof?”

Tikorsky nodded.

“Is there a fire-escape back of where you live?”

“Yeah, sure.”

MacBride reached for the phone, called the morgue. In a moment he was speaking with the deputy medical examiner. When he hung up he pursed his lips, and his eyes glittered.

“All right, Mr. Tikorsky,” he said. “You can go home. Thanks for telling me. I’ll see you again.”

The Pole shuffled out.

MacBride looked at Kennedy. “Out, Kennedy. Go home and hit the hay.”

“Ah, Mac, give a guy a break,” said Kennedy. “What’s in the wind?”

“A bad smell. Come on, breeze, now. When there’s any news getting out, I’ll let you know.”

Kennedy got up, shrugged, and sauntered out.

Moriarity and Cohen regarded the captain expectantly.

MacBride said, “I just got the doctor’s report. The bullet was a thirty-eight. It hit Bedell in the chest, knocked off part of his heart and lodged in his spine. But get this. The angle of the bullet was on a slant. It went in and *down.”*

“Then,” said Cohen, “it couldn’t have been fired from the corner where the broad saw this guy she was beefin’ about.”

“No,” clipped MacBride. “The Polack was right. He heard a guy on the roof. The guy who was on the roof bumped off Bedell.”

“What about this guy in the gray suit?”

“I’m wondering. But we know he couldn’t have done it. A bullet from him would have gone up and hit Bedell on the left somewhere.” He tapped his foot on the floor. “Well, the show is on, boys. Bonelio, the late alderman’s buddy, has a whale of an excuse to oil his guns and start a war of his own. And Krug, the State’s Attorney, will give him protection. Bonelio will suspect the same guy we do.”

“Duveen,” said Moriarity.

“Exactly. I know just what the greaseball will do.”

“Let him,” suggested Cohen, with a yawn. “Let the two gangs fight it out, exterminate each other. Who the hell cares?”

MacBride banged the desk. “You would say that, Ike. But I’m responsible for this precinct. I’ve got one murder hanging over my head as it is. Personally, I wouldn’t care if these two gangs did mop each other up. But in a gang war a lot of neutrals always get hurt.” He put on his hat. “Let’s look over the Polack’s roof.”

The three of them went around to 321 Jackson Street, located the rooms where the old Pole lived, and then ascended to the roof. Moriarity had a flashlight. They discovered nothing to which they might attach some relative importance. They took the fire-escape down to a paved alley that paralleled the back of the row of houses and led to Holly Street.

“See here, boys,” MacBride said. “Wander around and get the low-down on Duveen’s gang. If you see Duveen, cross-examine him. Better yet, tell him I want to see him.”

The two detectives moved off. MacBride headed back for the station-house and requisitioned the precinct flivver. A man named Garret was his chauffeur. After brief instructions on MacBride’s part, they drove off.

Twenty minutes later they stopped on Paradise Street, uptown. It was a thoroughfare of old brownstone houses that, following the slow encroachment of the white lights, had been turned into tearooms, night-clubs and small apartments, patronized mostly by people of the theatre.

Garret remained with the flivver. MacBride entered the Palmetto Club, to which an interior decorator had tried his best to give a tropical air. The manager did not know him, and said so.

“That’s all right,” said MacBride. “I don’t want to see you, anyhow. Where’s Bonelio?”

A moment later he met Bonelio in a private room handsomely furnished. Bonelio was a chunky Italian of medium height, dressed in the mode. He had smooth white skin, dark circles under his eyes, and an indolent gaze.

“Sit down, MacBride. Rye or Scotch?” he asked.

MacBride noticed a bottle of Golden Wedding. “Rye,” he said.

“Ditto.” Bonelio poured the drinks, said, “Well, poor Bedell.”

"What I came here about."

They looked at each other as they downed their tots.

"About what?" Bonelio dropped on to a divan and lit a cigarette.

"Just this," said MacBride. "I'm banking on the hunch that you suspect who's behind the killing. I'm asking, and at the same time telling you, to keep out of it. We've never been friends, Bonelio, and don't get it into your nut that I'm making any overtures. But I don't want any rough work done in my precinct. I'll handle it according to the law. You just stand aside and keep your hands off. You get me?"

"Sure. But let me tell you, MacBride, that the first pup gets in my way or monkeys around my playground, I'll start trouble and I don't give a damn whose precinct it's in. I'm sitting on top of the world in Richmond City and no guy's going to horn in."

"I'm telling you, Bonelio, walk lightly in my precinct. I'm giving you fair warning. I'm putting on the lid and I'm locking up any guy that so much as disturbs the peace. That goes for you and your gang as well as anybody else. You can sell all the booze you want. Much as I dislike you, I've never bothered your rum warehouses down by the railroad yards—"

"You were told not to. The big boys are my friends."

"Don't take advantage of it. I could be nasty if I wanted to. And I will, if you butt in in my precinct."

"Here's hoping you get Duveen for the murder of Bedell."

"Make sure *you* don't try to!"

MacBride banged out, hopped into the flivver and Garret drove him back to the station-house.

Moriarity and Cohen were playing penny-ante, half-heartedly.

"What news?" asked MacBride.

"None," said Cohen. "Duveen hasn't been seen for the past week."

"Hasn't, eh? All right, we want him, then. Sergeant," he called to the man at the desk, "ring Headquarters. General alarm. Chuck Duveen wanted. Ask Headquarters to spread the news and start the net working. I want Duveen before"—his lips flattened—"before somebody else gets him."

4

Next day the papers carried big headlines. The sheets that were in sympathy with the current administration bellowed loudly and asked the public to consider the drastic measures used by the opposition to gain its own end. The others, among them the *Free Press*, employed a calmer, more detached tone, and pleaded with justice to get at the root of all evil. Both Anderson and Connaught, aspirants for the offices of State's Attorney and alderman of the Sixth Election District respectively, deplored the tragedy and promised all manner of aid in running down the person or persons who had murdered their opponent, the late Alderman Bedell. State's Attorney Krug promised quick action in the event the criminal was apprehended. Charges and counter charges ran rampant.

MacBride, having gone home at three in the morning, did not get back on the job until noon. He felt rested and his clean-clipped face glowed ruddily from recent contact with lather and razor. He had read the papers on the way in

from Grove Manor with the attitude of a man who knows the inner workings of politics and newspaperdom. In short, a slight morsel of what he read was worthwhile, and the rest was bunk— salve for an outraged public.

The one item that drew his attention was about the fact that Adolph Shanz was to run for alderman in place of the late Alderman Bedell. This made him chuckle bitterly. As committeeman Shanz had been, ever since he was elected, clay in the hands of Krug and Bedell. If elected for alderman, he would be one of Krug's most pliable tools.

The police net was spread for Duveen. The city was combed up, down and across. But the man was not caught. The only information available, gleaned as it was from old familiar hangouts of the gang boss, showed that Duveen had not been seen for a week. A day passed, and then two and three, with the man still at large.

Wherefore, on the fourth day, Captain MacBride was convened for a solid hour with the Commissioner of Police, a man who ran the Department and gave quarter nowhere. The meeting took place in the morning, and before noon MacBride was back in the station-house. There he held a brief consultation with his assistants.

In conclusion, he said to the sergeant at the desk, "When Kennedy, or any other of his breed drifts in, tell him I have a statement for the press."

Alone in his office, he drank his first bracer and started his first cigar of the day. He chafed his hands vigorously, paced the floor with a little more than his customary energy, trailing banners of excellent cigar smoke behind him. A beam of sunlight streamed through the open window. On the telephone wires that passed behind the old station-house, birds were swaying and chirping. MacBride's eyes were keen and narrow with thought.

An hour later, when he was writing at his desk, a knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," he yelled.

Kennedy came in. "What the hell's this I hear about—"

"Sit down. Glad to see something can work you up and make you look as if you weren't dying on your feet."

"Come on, spill it, Mac!"

"My wife's birthday."

"Cripes—"

"Should see the new spring outfit I bought her. Kennedy, she gets younger every day. Well"—he cleared his throat with a serious comic air—"look who her husband is."

"For the love o' God, what's the matter, are you batty?"

MacBride grinned—one of his rare, broad grins that few people knew, outside of his wife and daughter.

"All right, Kennedy," he said. "I said I'd give you a break when I started broadcasting. I'm broadcasting. Tune in. Early this morning Detective Moriarity picked up a man for violating the state law regarding the possession of concealed weapons. This man was carrying an automatic pistol.

"He was cross-examined by Captain Stephen J. MacBride—don't omit the J. Intense questioning brought out certain interesting facts, in the light of which Captain MacBride hopes to apprehend—and don't insert 'it is alleged'— Captain MacBride hopes to apprehend the man who killed the late

Alderman Bedell within the next twenty-four hours.

"For certain reasons known to the Department alone, the informant's name will not be divulged for the present. Suffice it to say that during the course of the cross-examination it was learned that this man was the one who phoned anonymously to Captain MacBride about one hour before Alderman Bedell was murdered, warning him that the murder was prearranged."

He rubbed his hands together. "How does that sound? Pretty good for a plain, ordinary cop, eh? And I never took a correspondence course, either."

"But who's this guy you picked up?" demanded Kennedy.

"You heard me, didn't you? He's under lock and key right here in the precinct. Put that in, too, Kennedy. He's locked up at the precinct. But who he is—that's my business for the time being. Headquarters is standing by me to the bitter end on that. Now pipe down and consider yourself lucky I've given you this much. Here, sink a drink under your belt and see that story gets good space."

Still curious, Kennedy, nevertheless, went out. Within the hour other reporters got the story. It would be on the streets at four that afternoon.

Moriarity dropped in, when MacBride was alone, and asked, "Think it will work, Cap?"

"Man, oh, man, I'm banking everything on it right now. It's a bluff—sure, a hell of a big bluff. And if it doesn't trap somebody or give me a decent lead I'll take the razz. Just now the underworld is stagnant, Jake. This will be the stone that stirs the water. We're supposed to have somebody here who knows who killed Bedell. Whoever killed him, will make a move. What that move will be, I don't know, but I'm ready to meet it."

Moriarity was frankly dubious. "Dunno, Cap. Maybe I'm short on imagination. You're taking a long chance giving out the news we got a mysterious somebody picked up and locked in."

"I'm willing to take it, Jake. It's a bluff—the biggest bluff I ever pulled in my life. Just play with me, Jake. Appear mysterious. All you've got to keep saying is that you picked a guy up— but no more. I've got all the keys to that cell and nobody, I don't care who he is, is going to see that it's empty."

"Gawd," muttered Moriarity, "I hope you don't get showed up."

"That's all right, Jake. Cut out worrying. Just play your part, and if the breaks go against us, I'll take the razz personally."

Moriarity wandered out, far from overjoyed.

At four the news spread. Quick work, mused many—an important prisoner in the hands of the police already, with the account of the murder still vivid in the city's mind. And the mysterious tone of it; that was intriguing, MacBride holding the man's name a secret.

MacBride read three different sheets.

The *Free Press* mentioned his name more than the others. That was Kennedy's work. Good sort, Kennedy, even though he did get on a man's nerves at times. Kennedy's column was well-written, concise, cool, almost laconic.

At four-thirty a big limousine pulled up before the station-house. State's Attorney Krug, a large, faultlessly groomed man, innately arrogant, strode into MacBride's office swinging his stick savagely.

“Look here, Captain,” he rapped out, “what is the meaning of this? I refer to the late editions, and to this fellow Moriarity picked up.”

“What does what mean?” MacBride wanted to know, unperturbed.

Krug struck the floor with his stick. “Why, as State’s Attorney of this county, I think it is no more than pertinent that I should be informed of such important news before it comes out in the newspapers.”

“Dark secret, Mr. Krug,” said MacBride. “The Department’s prisoner. When we get through with him, we’ll turn him over to the State Attorney’s office.”

“But I should like to have a preliminary talk with the fellow, so that I may go about preparing briefs. I tell you, Captain, action is what is necessary.”

“I agree with you. But as it is, Mr. Krug, the prisoner is still in the Department’s hands.”

“Nonsense! We can have just an informal little chat. I want to see the fellow. What is he called, by the way?”

MacBride shook his head. “The whole thing is a dark secret. When I spring it, everybody’ll know.”

“But dammit, man, I am State’s Attorney! I demand to interview the prisoner!”

“I ought to add,” put in MacBride, “that I have the backing of the Department. There’s the phone if you care to call the Commissioner.”

State’s Attorney Krug departed in high heat, bewailing the fact that the Department was trying to double-cross the very efficient State’s Attorney’s office.

“You know why he’s in such a hurry, Jake?” MacBride asked Moriarity.

“Sure. Stage a fast trial, get a quick conviction. It’d help him for re-election.”

MacBride chuckled grimly. Moriarity drifted out, leaving the captain alone.

It was about half an hour later that the door swung open, and a tall, broad-shouldered man entered casually. He kicked the door shut with his heel, stood with his hands thrust into his coat pockets, a cigarette drooping from one corner of his mouth. His face was deeply bronzed, his eyes pale and hard as agate.

“My error,” he said, “if I didn’t knock. Thought I’d drop in and see why you’ve been looking for me.”

“Sit down, Duveen.”

“I’ll stand.”

MacBride leaned back in his chair. “Are you heeled?”

“No. Want to look?”

“I’ll take your word. But you’ve got one hell of a lot of nerve to come in here.”

“Open to the public, ain’t it?” Duveen gushed smoke through his nostrils. “I want to know what’s all this crack about you looking for me.”

“Where have you been for the last ten days?”

“I don’t see where that’s any of your business. I was touring. I took a ride to Montreal. Get up on your dates, skipper. I’ve been gone two weeks. Scouting around for good liquor. Got two truckloads coming down for the election— and afterwards.”

"Counting on Anderson and Connaught getting in?"

"Yup."

"Won't do you any good. Connaught's going to clean up this district, and you'll never be able to buy off Anderson."

"All I want is the bum Krug out. Well, you were looking for me. Here I am."

"About that Bedell killing."

"What about it?"

"You'll need a strong alibi to prove where you were on that night, Duveen."

"Talking of—arrest?"

"About that."

Duveen laughed. "Not a chance, MacBride. Krug would frame me so tight I'd never have a chance. Guess again."

"Nevertheless…" MacBride's hand moved toward the row of buttons on the desk.

Duveen snapped, "*Kid*!"

"Up high, Cap!" hissed a voice at the window.

MacBride swivelled. A rat-faced runt was leaning in through the open window, an automatic trained on the captain.

Duveen ran to the window, stepped out. There was an economy of words. With a leer, the rat-faced man disappeared.

MacBride yanked his gun, blew a whistle.

The reserves, Moriarity and Cohen came on the run. They swept out, guns drawn.

But the city swallowed Duveen and his gunman.

MacBride took the blow silently, choking down his chagrin.

"Did he wear a gray suit?" asked Moriarity.

"Yes," muttered MacBride. "Block all city exits, place men in the railroad station. Tell Headquarters to inform all outlying precincts and booths, motorcycle and patrol flivvers, Duveen's in town. What I can't understand is, why the hell he came strolling in here?"

"Crust, Cap. Duveen's got more gall, more nerve, than any bum I know of. Probably came looking for information."

"Yes, and I pulled a bone," confessed MacBride. "I should have played him a while, drawn him out. But seeing him here, I wanted to get the clamps on him right away. He had no gun—he's wise. But he had a gunman planted outside the window. If I can get him, get this Trixie Meloy gal to identify him as the man walked down Holly Street toward the roadster, we can crash his alibi. We know he couldn't have fired the shot, but it's likely one of his rats was planted on the roof, and Duveen was on hand to see things went off as per schedule."

An hour later the telephone rang.

"MacBride?"

The captain thought fast. "No. You want him?"

"Yes."

"Wait a minute."

MacBride dived into the central room, barked, "Sergeant, call the telephone

exchange— quick—see where this guy's calling from."

The sergeant whipped into action, had the report in less than a minute. "Booth number three at the railroad waiting room."

"Good. Call the Information Desk at the railroad. Cohen's there. Tell him to nab the guy comes out of booth three. Fast!"

The sergeant put the call through, snapped a brief order to Detective Cohen.

MacBride was on the way back into his office. He stood before the desk, looked at his watch. He would give Cohen two minutes. The two minutes ticked off. He picked up the instrument, drawled "MacBride speaking."

"Just a tip, MacBride. Your station-house is going to be blown up. If you're clever, you'll get the guys. Sometime tonight."

That was all.

MacBride hung up, sat back, his fists clenched, his eyes glued on the instrument.

5

Who was the man behind the voice? Who was he double-crossing, and why?

MacBride went into the central room, called out four reserves. "Look here, boys," he said. "I've got a tip somebody's going to try to blow up this place. One of you at each end of the block, the other two in the back. Let no machines come through the street. No people, either. Make 'em detour. Anybody around the back, pick him up. Anybody tries to hand you an argument, get rough. All right, go to it."

He went back into his office, clasped his hands behind his back and paced the floor.

Twenty minutes later the door opened. Cohen came in with a man. The man was a little disarranged. His natty clothes were dusty and his modish neckwear was askew. His derby had a dent in it, and wrath smoldered in his black eyes.

Slim and lithe he was, olive skinned, with long, trick sideburns that put him in the category familiarly known as "Sheik."

Cohen's explanation was simple. "He tried to argue, Cap."

MacBride rubbed his hands together briskly. The mysterious informant was in his hands. His enormous bluff, recently put into print, that he had a valuable suspect in connection with the murder of Bedell, had worked out admirably.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"I'm not telling," snapped the high-strung stranger, struggling for dignity.

"I want to thank you for those tips," went on MacBride, "but I want to know more. Now cut out the nonsense."

"I'm not telling," reiterated the stranger. "It was a dirty trick, getting me this way. If those guys knew I'd been tipping you off, my life wouldn't be worth a cent."

"You tell me your name," proceeded MacBride, "and I'll promise to keep your name mum until the whole show is over."

"That's out. I don't want your promise. I didn't do anything. I'm not a gangster. I was just trying to help you out and keep my name out of it at the same time. It wouldn't do you any good to hold me. I've got no record. I didn't do anything."

MacBride told him to sit down, then said, “I’m sorry we had to grab you, buddy, but I’ve got a lot to answer for, and I’ve no intentions of getting tough with you. Just come across.”

The man was losing his dignity rapidly. His black eyes darted about feverishly, his fingers writhed, his breath came in short little gasps. Fear was flickering across his face, not fear of MacBride, but of something or someone else. Mixed with the fear was a hint of anguish.

“Please,” he pleaded, “let me go. My God, if I’d thought it would come to this, that I’d be picked up, have my name spread around, I’d never have tipped you off. Give me a chance, Captain. Let me go. I told you this place is going to be blown up tonight.”

“Who’s going to blow it up?”

“Don’t make me tell that! God, don’t. I guess I’ve been a fool, but I—I— Oh, hell!” He choked on a hoarse sob. “I told you what’s going to happen. Lay for them. Get them when they try to blow you up. You’ll learn everything then.”

“Why have you been tipping me off?”

“I—for many reasons. A grudge, but behind the grudge—something else. It’s been driving me crazy. Haven’t been able to sleep. I was going to kill—but—I didn’t.” He raised his hands and shook them. “I’m lost, Captain, if you keep me, if you let loose who tipped you off. Dear God, give me a break—won’t you?”

He leaned forward, extending his hands, pleading with his dark eyes, his face lined with agony.

MacBride bit him with an unwavering stare. What tragedy was in this fellow’s life? He was sincere, that was certain. Something terrible was gnawing at his soul, making of him a shivering, palsied wreck, pleading eloquently for mercy.

“I don’t want anybody to know I’ve been in this,” he hurried on. “It’s not only my life’s at stake, it’s something else—something bigger and deeper. Don’t make me explain. I can’t. Isn’t it enough I warned you about this—this bombing?”

MacBride looked down at the desk, tapped his fingers meditatively. Then he looked up. “I’ll give you a break,” he said. “I’m going to lock you up for the night. If I get the men I want, you slide out quietly, and my mysterious informant remains a mystery. That’s a promise. If Cohen here can find a Bible, I’ll swear on it.”

“Not a Bible in the whole dump,” said Cohen.

The stranger was on his feet. “You promise, Captain? You will promise me that?”

“I’ve promised,” nodded MacBride.

“Thanks. God, thanks! I’ve heard you were a hard-boiled egg. I—I didn’t expect—”

“Pipe down. Ike,” he said to Cohen, “lock him up and keep your jaw tight about what’s just happened.”

Cohen took the man out, and MacBride leaned back to sigh and light a fresh cigar, musing, “Maybe I ought to get kicked in the pants for making that promise. But I think the guy’s hard-hit.”

Half an hour later he was visited by State’s Attorney Krug. Krug was pompous. “What are the latest developments, Captain?”

“Got some dope this joint is going to be blown up. You better get on your way.”

Krug’s eyes dilated. “Blown up!”

"Right."

"Then why don't you clear out?"

"See me clearing out for a lot of bums like that!"

"But this fellow you've got—this mystery man. Hadn't you better get him out of here? Don't you realize that it is possible they intend blowing up the place so that the man will be exterminated? Dead, he can give no evidence. I say, Captain, you ought to turn him over to me. Consider that I am eager to start a trial. We can use him, put the blame on him temporarily, at least make some headway. Come, now."

MacBride shook his head. "Nothing doing, Mr. Krug."

"This," stormed Krug, indignantly, "is monstrous!"

"If I were you, I'd get out of the neighborhood. Hell knows when these birds will show up. You don't want to follow in Bedell's footsteps, do you?"

"Damn my stars, you are impossible!" With that Krug banged out.

The echoes of his departure had barely died when Kennedy wandered in.

"How about some more news, Mac?"

"Thanks for mentioning my name so much in your write-up," replied MacBride. "When there's more news, you'll get it."

"Meaning there's none now."

"How clever you are!"

"Applesauce!"

"On your way, Kennedy."

"I'm comfortable."

"You won't be if you hang around here much longer. Now cut out the boloney, old timer. I'm busy, there's no news, and you're in my way."

Kennedy regarded him whimsically. "When you talk that way, Mac, I know there's something in the wind. All right, I'll toddle along." He coughed behind his hand. "By the way, I intended buying some smokes on the way over, but—"

MacBride hauled out his cigar box, and Kennedy, helping himself to a cigar, sniffed it as he sauntered to the door.

"I wish you'd keep 'em a little moist, Mac," he ventured.

He was gone before MacBride could throw him a verbal hot-shot.

The captain put on his visored cap, strode into the central room, looked around and then went out into the street. At the corner he paused for a brief chat with the policemen stationed there.

"Everything okay, boys?"

"So far, Cap."

"Keep a sharp lookout. If it comes, it will come suddenly."

The men nodded, fingering their nightsticks gingerly. A street light shone on their brass buttons, on their polished shields. Beneath their visors, their faces were tense and alert.

MacBride made a tour of the block, and then through the alley in the rear. Everything was calm, every man was in readiness. They spoke in voices a trifle bated. They exuded an

air of tense expectancy, peering keenly into the shadows, moving on restless feet.

As MacBride swung back into the central room he almost banged into the desk sergeant.

"Just about to call you, Cap," the sergeant puffed. "Holstein and Gunther just picked up a touring car with three guys, and a machine-gun and half-a-dozen grenades."

"Where?" MacBride shot back.

"Down near the railroad yards. They were coming north and stopped to fix a flat. Holstein and Gunther are bringing 'em in."

"Good!" exploded MacBride, and punched a hole in the atmosphere. "By George, that's good."

Moriarity and Cohen were grinning. "Looks like them guys got one bum break," chuckled Moriarity.

"Sure does, boys!"

MacBride strode up and down the room grinning from ear to ear. He kept banging fist into palm boisterously. He was elated.

A little later there was a big touring car outside, and a deal of swearing and rough-housing. MacBride went out, and found Holstein and Gunther manhandling three roughnecks. Kennedy was there, having popped up from nowhere.

"Knew something was in the wind, Mac," he chortled.

"You'll get plenty of headlines now, Kennedy," flung back the captain.

Patrolman Gunther said, "Nasty mutts, these guys, Cap. One of 'em tried to pull his rod and I opened his cheek."

"G' on, yuh big louse!" snarled that guy.

"I'll shove your teeth down your throat!" growled Gunther, raising his stick.

"All inside," clipped MacBride.

The roughs were bustled into the central room. A reserve carried in the grenades and the machine-gun. There was a noticeable lack of politeness on the part of the three gangsters. Also, there was noticeable lack of gentleness on the part of the policemen. One of the gunmen, a big, surly towhead, was loudest of all, despite the gash on his cheek. He started to make a pass at Gunther, but MacBride caught him by the shoulder, spun him around and slammed him down upon a chair.

"That'll be all from you, Hess," he ripped out warmly. "I guess we're near the bottom of things now."

"Who is he?" asked Kennedy.

"'Slugger' Hess, Duveen's strong-arm man."

"Hot diggity damn!"

"Now where's Duveen?" MacBride flung at Hess. "I want that guy. Every damn gangster in this burg is going to get treated rough. Now you come clean or you get the beating of your life!"

"And I'd like to do it, Cap," put in Gunther.

"Yah, yuh big hunk of tripe!" snarled Hess.

"Can that!" barked MacBride. "Where's Duveen?"

Hess was not soft-boiled. Despite the roomful of policemen, he stuck out his jaw. "Go

find him, Captain. You can't bulldoze me, neither you nor that pup Gunther!"

"Where's Duveen?" MacBride had a dangerous look in his eyes, and his doubled fists were swinging at his sides.

"You heard me the first time."

Gunther flexed his hands. "Should I sweat him, Cap?"

"Sweat the three of them," said MacBride. "In my office. Ike, Jake, you'll help," he added to Moriarity and Cohen.

Eager hands took hold of the three gangsters and propelled them toward MacBride's office.

But before they reached the door there was a terrific explosion, and the walls billowed and crashed.

6

Stone, splinters, plaster, beams thundered down. Yells and screams commingled with the tumult of toppling walls and ceilings. Lights were snuffed out. The roof, or what remained of it, boomed down. There were cries for help, groans, oaths. Tongues of flame leaped about, crackling.

MacBride found himself beneath a beam, an upturned table, and an assortment of other debris. Near him somebody was swearing violently.

"That you, Jake?"

"Yeah, Cap… if I can get this damn hunk of ceiling off my chest…"

MacBride squirmed, twisted, heaved. He jackknifed his legs and knocked aside the table. He brushed powdered plaster from his eyes, spat it from his mouth. The beam was harder. It was wedged down at both ends by other weighty debris, and MacBride could not shove it off.

But he twisted his body from side to side, backed up bit by bit, finally won free and stood up. His face was bloody, the sleeve of his right arm was torn from shoulder to elbow. He did not know it. He stumbled toward the pinioned Moriarity, freed him from the weighty debris pressing upon him and helped him to the sidewalk.

Going back in, he ran into Cohen. Ike was carrying a semi-conscious desk sergeant.

A crowd had already gathered. People came on the run from all directions. Somebody had pulled the fire-alarm down the block. The flames were growing. From a crackling sound they had been whipped into a dull roar.

Two battered but otherwise able policemen came out and MacBride sent them to chase away the crowd. Blocks away fire-engines were clanging, sirens were screaming. The policemen fought with the crowd, drove it back down the street. MacBride and Cohen were busy carrying out those they were able to pry from beneath the debris.

The first fire-engine came booming around the corner, snorted to a stop, bell clanging. Helmeted fire-fighters with drawn axes ran for the building. A couple of flashlights blinked. The big searchlight on the fire-engine swung around and played its beams on the demolished station-house. The firemen stormed into the mass of wreckage, hacked their way through to the pinioned men.

MacBride plowed back into the cell where the mysterious stranger had been placed

a few hours before. He had trouble finding him. The man was deep beneath the wreckage. MacBride ran out, got an axe and came back to chop his way through. He carried out a limp dead weight.

Other engines came roaring upon the scene. There was a din of ringing bells, hooting motors, loud commands. Hose was being strung out. Streams of water began shooting upon the building, roaring and hissing. A grocery store down the street was used to shelter the injured men, all of whom had been taken from the building. An ambulance was on the way.

MacBride and Cohen were bending over the stranger. He was a mass of bruises, scarce able to breathe, let alone talk.

"Guess… I'm… dying," he whispered, his eyes closed, his body twitching with pain.

"The hell you are!" said MacBride. "We'll have an ambulance here in a minute."

"Don't… tell." He struggled for breath, then choked. "Two ten… Jockey Street… Get 'em!" Then he fainted.

One of the gangsters was dead. The two others had escaped in the wild melee.

Kennedy was alive, though pretty much the worse for wear. He was hatless, covered with soot and grime, one eyes closed, a welt on his forehead. He limped, too, but he was not daunted.

"What next, Mac?"

MacBride turned. "God, Kennedy, you look rotten!"

"Feel rotten. I'd like to find the guy put his heel on my eye. I'm out of smokes. Who's got a butt?"

Moriarity had one.

The battalion chief for the fire department came up. "Hello, Mac. Bomb, eh? Yeah, I know. I've just been around. It was pitched through a window in the back." He looked up. "Good-bye, station-house, Mac!"

Even as he said this the front swayed, caved in with a smother of smoke, cinders and flame. Firemen rushed to escape the deluge. The hose lines pounded the place with water.

Detective Cohen appeared, with a bad wrist—his left hand.

"Where you been, Ike?" asked MacBride.

"Looking around. Guy in a cigar store around the corner said he was looking out the window a few minutes before the fireworks. Saw a big blue sedan roll by slow. He noticed because it's a oneway alley and classy machines don't often go through it. Runs back of the station-house, you know—Delaney Street."

"See here, boys." MacBride's voice was tense. "You all well heeled? Good. We're going to take a ride up to 210 Jockey Street, and I smell trouble. There's something here I don't understand. We were caught napping. I'll say I was— I'm the dumb-bell. There I thought I had the case all ready to bake, and we were blown up."

He found Lieutenant Connolly and gave him brief orders. He gathered together six reserves and Moriarity and Cohen. They used the big touring car in which Hess and the other two gangsters had been brought to the precinct. Gunther drove, and as he was about to slide into gear, Kennedy came up on the run.

"Room there for me, Mac?"

MacBride groaned. Getting rid of Kennedy was like getting rid of a leech. But taking a look at Kennedy, seeing him all banged

up but still ready to carry on, the captain experienced a change of heart.

"Hop in," he clipped.

The big machine lurched ahead. Once in high gear the eight cylinders purred smoothly.

Two left turns and a right, and they were on a wide street that led north. In the distance the reflection of the white light district glowed in the sky. Ten men were in the car. There was no room for comfort.

The white light district grew nearer.

MacBride and his men ignored traffic lights. They struck Jockey Street. Jockey Street is like a cave. At one end it is lit by the glare of the theatrical district. As one penetrates it, it becomes darker, narrower, and the street lamps are pallid. Two and three-story houses rear into the gloom, lights showing here and there, but not in abundance. Most of the doors are blank-faced, foreboding. It is a thickly populated section, but pedestrians are rare. More than one man has been killed in lower Jockey Street. Patrolmen always travel it in pairs.

The machine stopped.

"Two ten's on the next block," said MacBride. "We'll leave the car here. Gunther, you and Barnes go over one block south and come up in the rear. Hang around there in case anybody tries to get out. The rest of us will try the front."

They all alighted. Gunther and Barnes, their sticks drawn, their pistols loose in their holsters, started off purposefully. MacBride, though he saw no one, had a vague feeling that eyes were watching him from darkened windows. People might have been curious in Jockey Street, like all humanity, but they differed materially in that they rarely came into the open to vent their curiosity.

As the men walked down the street, their footsteps re-echoed hollowly; a nightstick clicked against another. MacBride led the way, a jut to his jaw, his fingers curled up in his palms. Home, in peaceful Grove Manor, his wife was probably mending socks. Maybe his daughter was playing the piano; something about Spring from Mendelssohn or one of those Indian love lyrics. Well, he carried lots of insurance.

How about the men with him? Most of them married, too, with little kids. Moriarity, Cohen, Feltmann, Terchinsky, O'Toole, Pagliano. Gunther and Barnes in the back. Two hundred a month for the privilege of being a target for gunmen. They made far less—and paid double the life insurance premium—than many a man whose most important worry was a cold in the head or the temperature of his morning bath.

"This is it," said MacBride.

Kennedy said, "Dump."

"You stay out of it, Kennedy."

"If you've got a pen-knife I'll sit out here and play mumble-peg on the pavement."

In front of the house, which was a two-story affair built of red brick, was a depression reached by four stone steps that led down to the basement windows. At a word from MacBride, the men hid in this depression. A single step led to the front and main entrance, where there was a vestibule with glass in the upper half.

Alone, MacBride approached this, tried the door, and finding it locked, pressed a bell button. Somewhere distant he heard the bell ring. He took off his cap of rank and held it under his left arm, partly to hide his identity. His teeth were set, his lips compressed. He rang again.

Presently he heard a latch click. It was on the inner door. There was a long moment

before a face moved dimly in the gloom behind the vestibule window. MacBride made a motion to open the door. The face floated nearer, receded, remained motionless, then came nearer again. Then it disappeared abruptly. The inner door banged. He heard running feet.

"We crash it, boys!" he barked in a low voice.

His revolver came out. One blow shattered the glass in the vestibule. He reached in, snapped back the latch. His men swarmed about him. He leaped into the vestibule, tried the next door. It was locked, built entirely of wood.

"All together, boys," he clipped.

En masse, they surged against the door. Again they surged. Wood creaked, groaned, then splintered. The door banged up under the impetus, and the law swept in. MacBride had a flashlight. It clicked into life, its beam leaped through the gloom. He turned.

"Holstein and Feltmann! Guard the front!"

"Yup, Cap!"

His flashlight swung up and down, back and forth, showed a stairway against one wall, leading to regions above. In the lower hall, he saw two closed doors.

"Bust these!"

He was the first to leap. The first door opened easily. The room was bare, unfurnished. He dived out and tried the next. It was unlocked. Empty. But it was meagerly furnished; a cot, a table, a rocking-chair, a gas stove.

"Lookout's room," he speculated. "Guy who came to the door."

Sentences, words, were clipped.

The flashlight's beam picked out the foot of the stairway.

"Up, boys!"

MacBride was off on the run. He led the way up the stairs.

Came two gun reports, muffled.

"Gunther and Barnes," he said. "These guys are trying for a break."

They were in the hall above. The first door they tried was locked. MacBride hurled his weight against it.

Bang!

A shot splintered the panel, passed the captain's cheek. He sprang back.

Moriarity, leaning against the bannister, shot from the hip. He plastered four shots around the doorknob. Pagliano put three more there. Then they waited, silent, all guns drawn. They listened. Men were moving inside the room. There was an undertone of voices.

MacBride turned to Cohen "Ike, go downstairs and get the chair in that room."

Cohen departed, returned carrying a heavy kitchen chair. MacBride took a chair, hefted it, then swung it over his head and dived with it toward the door. The chair splintered; so did the door. A couple of shots banged from the inside. MacBride felt a sting on his cheek. Blood trickled down his jaw.

Two policemen stood side by side and pumped bullets into the room. There was a hoarse scream, the rush of bodies, the pound of feet. Glass shattered.

Firing, MacBride and Moriarity hurtled into the room. Moriarity saw a dim figure going

out through the window. He fired. The figure buckled and was gone.

"They've made the roof!" clipped MacBride.

He jumped to the window, out upon the fire-escape, up to the roof. He could see vague blurs skimming over the roof of the adjoining house. For a block these roofs were linked together, trimmed with chimneys, ventilating shafts, radio aerials.

Cohen went past MacBride in leaps and bounds, stopped suddenly, crouched and fired two shots. One knocked a man over. The other whanged through a skylight. Moriarity cut loose, missed fire.

Then the gunmen, near the end of the row of roofs, stopped and hid behind chimneys and the projections that separated one roof from another. They sprinkled the night generously with gunfire. Officer Terchinsky went down with a groan, came up again.

The policemen advanced warily, darting from chimney to chimney, crouching behind a skylight, wriggling forward. MacBride was mopping the wound on his cheek with a handkerchief. His gun was in the other hand. Moriarity was with him. A slug chipped off the corner of the chimney behind which they crouched.

Moriarity fired.

"Got that bum!" he muttered.

Both sides suddenly opened a furious exchange of shots. Lead ricochetted off the roof, twanged through aerial wires, shattered the glass in skylights. Shouts rose, sharp commands and questions. The policemen rose as one and galloped forward, firing as they ran.

The gunmen loomed up in the darkness— four, five, six of them. Guns bellowed and belched flame at close quarters. Terchinsky, already wounded, went down again, this time to stay. Guns empty, the men clashed, hand to hand, clubbing rifles. Nightsticks became popular.

Below, crowds were gathering, machines coming from other districts. Police whistles were blowing.

Gunther and Barnes came up from the rear, joined the fight. From then on it was short-lived. Every one of the six gunmen, rough customers to the last man, were beaten down, and most of them were unconscious.

The policemen were not unscathed, either. Terchinsky, of course, was dead. Cohen was on the point of collapse. MacBride was a bit dazed. They handcuffed the gangsters. MacBride looked them over, one by one, with his flashlight, and then went off to examine the ones who had been shot down. Moriarity was with him.

"Recognize anybody, Cap?"

"One or two, but can't place 'em. I'd hoped to find Duveen."

"Didn't you pot a guy going through the window? Maybe he fell down the fire-escape."

"That's right, Jake. Let's look."

MacBride gave brief orders to his men, told them to carry the prisoners down to the ground floor. Then he went off with Moriarity, descended the fire-escape, followed it down to the bottom.

Lying on the ground, face down, was a man dressed in a tuxedo. MacBride turned him over.

"Alive," he muttered, "but unconscious."

"Who is he?" asked Moriarity. MacBride snapped on his flash, leaned over, his eyes dilating.

"*Bonelio*!" he muttered.

Kennedy was coming down the fire-escape.

7

A day later MacBride stood in a large room in Police Headquarters. He was a little pale. His cheek was covered with cotton and adhesive tape. Moriarity was there, strips of tape over his right eye. And Cohen's left arm was in a sling.

Against one wall was a bench. On this bench sat Trixie Meloy, Adolph Shanz, and Beroni, manager of the Palmetto Club. All three were manacled, one to the other. Shanz was despair personified. Beroni was haggard. Trixie wore a look of contempt for everybody in the room.

Kennedy came in, sat down at a desk and played with a pencil.

MacBride said, "I have a letter here that I'm going to read. It will interest you, Miss Meloy."

He spread a sheet before him, said, "It was dictated to a stenographer at the hospital by a man named Louis Martinez."

Trixie bit her lip.

MacBride read, "'To Captain Stephen MacBride: The man you want is Tony Bonelio. I worked in his club. I was Miss Meloy's dancing partner. We'd danced before, all over the country. I loved her. I thought she loved me. Maybe she did until Bonelio won her with money. It drove me crazy. I wanted to kill him. But I didn't. But I learned a lot. He killed Bedell. I heard the plans being made. Bedell was getting hard to handle. State's Attorney Krug and Shanz and Bonelio got together. Shanz was to get Bedell on the speaker's platform, so Bonelio could shoot him from the roof. Shanz and Krug staged the block-party just for that. When Bonelio read that you had a man prisoner who was in the know, I heard him phone Krug. Krug promised to go down and get the man from you. Whoever he was, they were going to pay him a lot of money to take the rap. But when you wouldn't give him up, Bonelio told Krug there was only one way—blow the station up.

"'I tipped you about all this because I wanted to see Bonelio get his. I wanted to win back Trixie's love. But I knew if she knew I'd done all that, she'd never look at me again. I was crazy about her. I was, but that's over. I was lying here, dying, and I called her up to come over. She told me to go to hell and croak. I've been a fool. I see what she is now. But go easy with her, Captain, anyhow. The only thing she did was to go to the block-party and say she saw a man in a gray suit walking away. She didn't see anybody. It was just a stall. That's all she did, except what she did to me. I don't know, maybe I still love her.'"

MacBride concluded, and you could have heard a pin drop. Then he said, "That was Martinez's death-bed confession."

"The damn sap!" snapped Trixie, her face coloring.

"What a fool he was to waste his time on a hunk of peroxide like you," observed Kennedy. "And what a dirty write-up I'm going to give you, sister."

"Rats for you, buddy," she gave him.

"Here's hoping you become a guest of the state. Don't forget to primp up and look

pretty when the tabloid photographers get around. I don't even see what the hell Bonelio saw in you."

"Damn you, shut up!" she cried fiercely.

"Now, now," cut in MacBride, "that'll be enough. You, Shanz, are under arrest, and your trial won't come up till the new administration's in."

"Where's Krug?" he grumbled.

"Still looking for him," said MacBride. "He slipped out at three this morning. Moriarity was over to his house and saw signs of a hasty departure. Krug got cold feet when he heard we had Bonelio. He knew he couldn't help Bonelio, because the wop staged a gunfight with us. And he knew that if Bonelio knew Krug couldn't help him, then Bonelio would squeal. As a matter of fact, Bonelio has squealed. You'll go on trial in connection with the killing of Bedell. The net is out for Krug."

Even as he said this, the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Hello," drawled a voice. "I want MacBride."

"You've got him."

"Well, MacBride, this is Duveen. I was sore as hell because you picked up Hess and the other two boys. They were on the way to blow up one of Bonelio's warehouses. Say, I hear you're looking for Krug."

"Yes, I am. He's wanted—bad."

"I've got him. I'm calling from up-State. He ran into me a little while ago with his car. I nabbed him. I'm sending him in with a State trooper. That's all, MacBride."

"Thanks. Drop in for a drink some time."

"I might, at that."

That was all.

MacBride rubbed his hands together. "And now we've got Krug," he said. "Krug, Shanz, Bonelio. And thank God, they'll go on trial when Anderson is State's Attorney."

Shanz groaned. A little man, a tool of others, he had tried to barter honor for power.

The three of them, including Trixie Meloy, were marched out and locked in separate cells.

The commissioner came in, a large, benign man, mellow-voiced, steady-eyed.

"Congratulations, MacBride," he said, and shook warmly. "It was great work. You've broken up an insidious crowd in Richmond City, and there's every possibility you'll be made inspector and attached to my personal staff."

"The breaks helped me," said MacBride. "I got a lot of good breaks toward the end."

"That may be your way of putting it. Personally, I attribute your success to nerve, courage and tenacity."

With that he left.

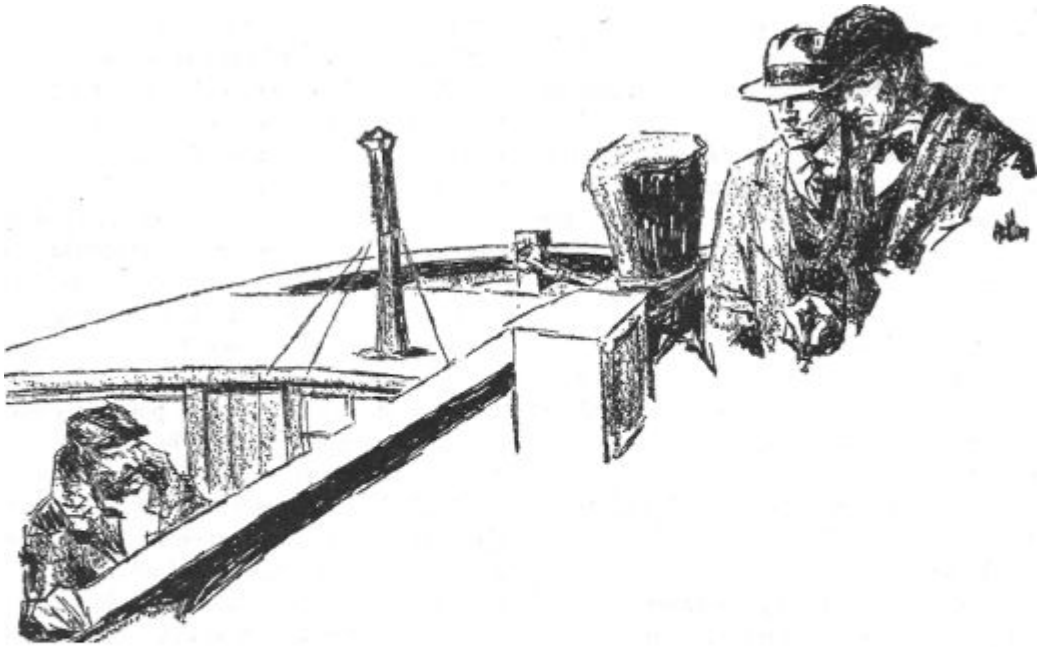
MacBride sighed, sat down, and felt his head. It hurt, there was a dull pain throbbing inside. He would carry a three-inch scar on his cheek for life. He felt his pockets.

"Thought I had a smoke…"

Kennedy looked up, grinned, pulled a cigar from his pocket. "Have one on me, Mac."

MacBride eyed him for a moment in silent awe. Then he chuckled. "Thanks, Kennedy. I see where I have to buy you a box of Montereys."

“See they’re good and moist, Mac,” said Kennedy.



Law Without Law

Frederick Nebel

1

KENNEDY CHUCKLED. “So you’re back in the Second, Mac.”

“See me here, don’t you?’

“Ay, verily!”

The old station-house blown up during the last election had been rebuilt, and the office in which Captain Stephen MacBride sat and Kennedy, the insatiable news-hound, stood, smelled of new paint and plaster. Something of the old atmosphere was lost—that atmosphere which it had taken long years to create: dust, age-colored walls decorated with

“Said we ought to get on well.”

“Was he nice?”

“Gave me a drink and asked about the health of my family.”

“Hot damn!” Kennedy clasped his hands and with a serio-comic expression stared at the ceiling. “O, Lord what hath come over the powers that be in this vale of iniquity, Richmond City?”

“You jackass!”

“Mac, poor old slob—”

“Don’t call me a slob!”

“Mac, my dear, what’s up now? Why did the Commissioner suddenly put you in the precinct nearest your heart’s desire?”

“Out of the pure and simple goodness of his heart.”

"Amen!"

Kennedy sagged limply and supported himself with one extended arm against the wall.

"Of course, Mac," he said, "you know and I know that this is one awful lot of liverwurst."

"Then why ask?"

"Kidding you."

"Ho!"

"Getting your goat."

"Ho! Ho!"

Kennedy left the wall, crept dramatically across the floor and slid silently upon the desk. And in a hushed voice, with mock seriousness, he said, "Mac, somebody's trying to make a boob out of you!"

"How do you know?"

"I suspect, old tomato—I suspect. It's too sudden, Mac. Stroble has got something up his sleeve. He's brought you back into the town for a purpose."

"How big do you think he is?"

"Pretty big."

"Big enough to be the Big Guy?"

"Almost—and yet, not quite."

"Who is?"

"Beginning to get a faint idea. If I'm right, the Big Guy has been behind it all from the very beginning. The gangs have come and gone, but the Big Guy has succeeded in remaining hidden. If it's the bozo I think it is…"

"Yes?"

"I don't think you'll reach him."

"Oh, go to hell, Kennedy! Listen, I'll get to him. Man alive, I *couldn't* lay off now! The thing's got in my blood. I've got to see it through. And I'm going to."

"Well, Mac, so far you've surprised me. Why you aren't occupying a snug grave in somebody's cemetery, is beyond me. But you've still got lots of opportunity of following in Jack Cardigan's footsteps. He was a poor slob."

"A martyr, Kennedy."

"Well, dignify it." Kennedy put on his topcoat. "I'm going places, Mac. Good-luck."

He wandered out, trailing cigarette smoke.

MacBride creaked back and forth in his chair, stopped to light a cigar, went on creaking. Damn new chairs, the way they creaked! The whole room was strange, aloof. Not like the old one, not as dusty—as intimate. Those three chairs standing against the wall—mission oak, bright and shiny, like the desk. Everything trim and spic and span—on parade. Even the clock was new, had a fast, staccato tick. He remembered the old one, a leisurely, moon-faced old chronometer, never on time.

A noise in the central room roused him. He raised his eyes and regarded the door. It burst open. Rigallo and Doran and a third man weaved in. The third man looked like a Swede, and was a head taller than either of the detectives. He slouched ape-like, great arms dangling, and his sky-blue eyes were wide and belligerent. He wore corduroy trousers, a blue pea-jacket.

"What's this?" asked MacBride.

Rigallo said, “Know him?”

“No.”

The two detectives steered the man across the room and pushed him into one of the three chairs. He looked more the ape than ever—an ape at bay—sitting there with shoulders hunched, jaw protruding, huge hands dangling across his knees.

“Who is he?” asked MacBride.

“Says Alf Nelson,” clipped Rigallo. “Me and Tim here were poking around the docks. We caught this baby trying to set a Tate & Tate barge adrift. He’d slipped the bow line and we caught him as he was on the stern.”

“H’m,” muttered MacBride. “That right, Nelson?”

“It ain’t.”

“He’s a lousy liar!” snapped Rigallo.

“We saw him,” supplemented Doran.

MacBride said, “Come Nelson, why did you do it?”

“I tell you, I didn’t do nothin’.” His Scandinavian accent was barely noticeable. “These guys are tryin’ to frame me.”

“Ah-r-r!” growled Rigallo. “Can that tripe, buddy! D’ you think we waste time framin’ guys? Come down to earth, you big white hope!”

“Look here, Nelson,” said MacBride, rising. “This is damned serious. It’s a rough night on the water, and that barge would have caused a lot of trouble. Riggy, was anybody on the barge?”

“Yeah, guy sleeping. We woke him up. Scoggins. He was scared stiff, and I’ll bet he doesn’t sleep a wink the rest of the night.”

MacBride took three steps and stood over Nelson. “Did you have a grudge against Scoggins?”

“No. I tell you, I ain’t done nothin’. I found the lines loose and was tryin’ to fix ‘em.”

“Cripes!” spat Rigallo.

“Who’s he work for, Riggy?”

“Dunno. Frisked him for a gat. Here it is. Thirty-eight.”

MacBride said, “Who do you work for, Nelson?”

Nelson growled, pressed back in his chair. MacBride reached down toward his pockets. Nelson raised a hand to block him. Doran caught the hand and knocked it aside. MacBride went through the man’s pockets.

“H’m. Badge,” he said, “of the Harbor Towing. This guy’s a barge captain. Here’s his Union card. Name’s right. Thirty-five. Unmarried, citizen. Listen, Nelson, come across now. Why the hell did you try to cut that barge loose?”

“I told you I didn’t try to cut no barge loose,” rumbled Nelson.

MacBride turned on Rigallo. “You’re sure he did, Riggy?”

“Ask Tim.”

“Sure he did, Cap,” said Doran.

MacBride put Nelson’s belongings in the desk and said, “Tim, plant him in a cell. I’m going down to the river. You come along, Riggy.

There may be something in this, and there may not."

2

T was cold and windy on the waterfront. The pier sheds loomed huge and sombre, and overhead the sky arched black as a cavern roof. And there was not a solitary star afield, not a vagrant moonbeam, not a patch of color against the black inverted bowl.

The river was a dark mystery moving restlessly toward the sea, and fringed sparsely with pier-head lights which probed its surface with thin, tremulous needles of radiance. And here and there, between the fringes, other lights— red, green, white—marked black shapes that moved through the thick gloom. The sound of bells, rung intermittently, skipped across the water with startling clarity.

MacBride and Rigallo strode down Pier Five and came to a barge moored at the end. Beneath them the water gurgled among the piles, and the barge thumped dully against the wharf. The tide was high, and they leaped to the barge without difficulty.

A man was standing in the doorway of a small, lighted cabin, smoking a pipe.

"Scoggins," said Rigallo.

"Hello, Scoggins," said MacBride. "Let's go inside."

They entered and Scoggins closed the door and leaned back against it. He was a small man, knotty in the framework, weather-beaten, steady-eyed.

MacBride said, "You know Nelson?"

"Yeah, years—from seem' him around the docks and in the lunch-wagon sometimes. Works for the Harbor Towin'."

"Ever have a scrap with him?"

"Nope."

"Sure?"

"Yup. But I got a scare tonight, though!"

"You figure he tried to cut you loose?"

"Says he didn't. I ain't never had a line slip on me yet, and I been twenty years on the river."

"Well, look here, can you think of anything that might cause him to do it?"

Scoggins frowned thoughtfully and rubbed his jaw. "Gosh, I dunno. Of course, Tate & Tate, the comp'ny I work for, had a split with the Union, and they ain't hirin' Union men 'less they can help it. The Harbor Towin''s all Union. Guys get in scraps over that sometimes. Day before vest'day Bill Kamp, who's on Number Three Barge, got in a fight with a Harbor Towin' guy. The guy called Bill a scab and Bill poked him."

"What caused this split with the Union?"

"Dunno. Just know they split. Young Mr. Tate was sore as hell over somethin'."

"Do you know what barge Nelson is on?"

"Number Three. Up at Pier Twelve now."

MacBride turned to Rigallo. "Come on, Riggy, let's snoop around."

They left Pier Five, reached the cobbled street and walked north. Fifteen minutes later they turned into a covered pier, met a

watchman, flashed their shields and passed on down the vast interior.

On the south side of Pier Twelve they found a lighter flying a metal pennant numbered Three. A light shone in the little cabin. They leaped down from the wharf, pushed open the door and walked in.

A girl sat on the bunk. She was a large girl— not fat, but large, broad in the shoulders, wide at the hips. Her skin was fair, her hair light brown; and her cheek-bones were high, prominent; her mouth wide with lips full and frankly sensuous. Her clothes were cheap and not precisely in the mode, and she regarded the two intruders with a dull stare.

Rigallo smiled. “Hello, girlie.”

“Hal-lo.”

“Where’s Alf?” asked MacBride.

“Ay don’t know.”

“H’m. We were supposed to meet him here tonight,” lied Rigallo.

“Yes,” nodded MacBride.

She shrugged her broad shoulders. “So vas I. Dat Alf iss neffer on time.”

“Ah, he’s a good guy, though,” said Rigallo.

She regarded him stolidly for a moment, then grinned, showing large white teeth. “Yah, Alf iss good fal-ler. Ay vait. You fal-lers vaiting for Alf?”

“Sure,” nodded Rigallo. “We’re his friends. Eh, Mac?”

“You said it, Riggy.”

“Alf’s some guy,” said Rigallo.

“Yah,” nodded the girl, shedding some of her nerves. “Alf iss good fal-ler.” She paused, meditated heavily, then laughed and slapped her knee. “Ay tal you, Alf is vun big guy. Dis Meester Braun he likes Alf much.”

“Sure,” said MacBride. “Mr. Braun’s a good guy, too. But he should treat Alf better.”

Still more of the girl’s reserve vanished, and she leaned forward, waxing confidential. “Yah, like Ay tol’ Alf. But Ay’t’ank dis Meester Braun iss be sqvare by Alf. Alf he tal me he vill get lots dol-lars.”

“Well, it’s no more than right,” put in Rigallo.

“Yah. Alf vill be rich fal-ler some day.”

MacBride and Rigallo grinned at each other. Then they grinned at the girl, and MacBride said, “Gosh, miss, Alf’s been holding back on us. Never told us he had a nice girl like you.”

She dropped her eyes. “Yah, Ay’t’ank Alf luffs me lot. Ay luff Alf lot.”

“He’ll invite us to the wedding, though, I hope,” said MacBride.

“Sure,” nodded Rigallo.

“Yah,” said the girl.

MacBride tried. “When did Alf say he would be back?”

“Vun hour ago. But Ay vill vait.”

“Yeah,” said Rigallo. “Alf said something about a job down on Pier Five. I wondered what he meant.”

“Vass it Pier Five?” asked the girl.

"Yeah," said Rigallo.

"Ay vill go."

"No. You stay here," put in MacBride. "We'll look him up and tell him you're waiting. What did he say he was doing?"

"Alf didn't say. Alf ain't tal me much, but he say he be very busy dese nights soon."

MacBride stood up. "Well, if we see him, we'll tell him you're waiting. What did you say your name was?"

"Hilda. Hilda Yonson. Ay come from Oslo two year' ago."

"See you again," said MacBride.

"Yeah, see you again," said Rigallo.

"Yah," said Hilda Yonson.

MacBride and Rigallo climbed back to the wharf and strode through the pier-shed.

"Who is Braun?" asked Rigallo.

"Don't know. Probably one of the bosses. We'll ask the night watchman."

In a little office at the far end of the pier they found the watchman, and MacBride asked, "Who is Mr. Braun?"

"Manager. Yeah, he's the manager."

"Good-night," said MacBride, and steered Rigallo into the street.

"What now, Cap?"

"Nothing, until I see Braun."

"It looks as if Nelson is somebody's dope."

"What I think, Riggy. Flag that taxi."

MacBride went home that night, pounded his ear for eight hours and was back on the job at eight next morning. In plain clothes, he left the station-house and went down to the general offices of the Harbor Towing Company, which were located over Pier Nine.

Braun had evidently just arrived, for he was going through the morning's mail. He was a fat, swarthy man, nervous and shifty, with a vague chin.

"Oh, Captain MacBride," he said. "Ah, yes. Won't you sit down? Won't you have a cigar?"

MacBride sat down but refused the cigar.

"You probably know," he said, "that I've got one of your barge captains over at the station-house."

Braun's eyes squinted, and he licked his lips. "Why, no! That's too bad. Likely a drunken brawl, eh? Well, I suppose I'll have to bail him out—mark against his salary."

"Not quite," said MacBride. "He was caught trying to cut a barge adrift last night. Pretty serious."

"Well, I should say so! Can you imagine! Humph! You never know what these drunks will do."

"But Nelson wasn't drunk."

"Well, that *is* strange! Now why do you suppose he tried to do a fool thing like that, Captain?"

"Search me. Thought maybe you might know."

"Me?"

"Uhuh."

"But, Captain, I'm surprised, how should I know why these fool Swedes—"

"Aboveboard, now, Mr. Braun!"

"Why—um—why, what do you mean?"

"Don't make me go into detail."

"But I tell you, Captain, I don't understand—"

"Aboveboard, Mr. Braun!"

Braun pursed his lips, his eyes dilated. He looked amazed. "Really, Captain—"

"Oh, for God's sake, cut out this stalling!"

"I tell you, Captain, I'm in the dark. I don't know what you're driving at."

MacBride's lips curled. "There's something crooked somewhere."

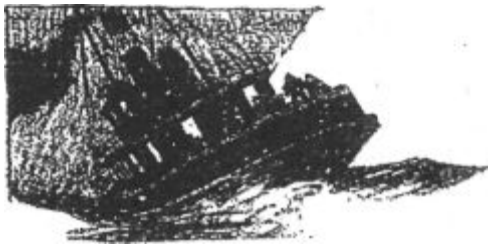
"Well, if there is, I'd certainly like to know-about it. If Nelson has been going wrong, I'll certainly fire him. Tell you what, I'll go down to the station-house and give him a talking. Let's see. It's nine now. I'll be there at ten, Captain."

MacBride stood up. "I'll be waiting there."

"Good! Won't you have a cigar?"

"No."

MacBride's exit was like a blast of wind.



3

Twenty minutes later he walked into the offices of Tate & Tate, and a boy piloted him into the sanctum of Hiram Tate, the younger and executive member of the firm. Tate was a lank, rock-boned man of forty-odd, with flashing dark eyes.

"I came over," said MacBride, "about that bit of business on Pier Five last night."

"Oh, you did? Good! I'll go right over with you and prefer charges against this bird you've got."

"What is your opinion?" asked MacBride. "Why do you suppose he tried to cut that barge loose?"

"Captain, my answer will be heavily prejudiced. You want to know what I think? I think that the Harbor Towing is trying to intimidate me. We're non-Union. I'll tell you why. Mike Tate, my old man, was double-crossed. And keep this under your hat. The Harbor Towing and Tate & Tate have always been rivals for the river trade.

"We've had more damned inspectors on our tail than I thought were in existence. What for? For little things. Unsanitary lavatories. Doors that opened in instead of out. Electric wiring. Unsafe barges. Condemned tugs. Ever since we kicked the Union in the slats.

"And what started it? The municipal pier at Seaboard Basin. It was offered for sale, and we wanted it. The Harbor Towing wanted it. We claimed it should come logically to us because

we had no uptown terminal and did a lot of uptown business. The Harbor Towing carried it right to the Union. I was out of town. The old man represented us, and he's known for a convivial old souse. They got him tight at the board meeting, and he signed all the dotted lines he could find.

"Well, we couldn't retract. The whole mess was attested by a notary, and when the old man came to he discovered that the Harbor Towing owned the municipal pier. When I came back to town I found him raving mad. I got sore, too, and we told the Union what we thought of it, and dropped. What's the use of catering to an outfit that kowtows to big money? The Harbor Towing is a big outfit, and they get all the court decisions, too. It's damned funny. When we get a square deal, get at least one section of the municipal pier to unload and load freight, we'll go back into the fold. That's my story. Believe it or not."

"I'll think it over. If you want to press a charge against Nelson, we'll indict him."

"I'll press charges, all right!" Tate rose and put on his overcoat. "Have a cigar?"

"Go good. Thanks."

They drove to the station-house in Tate's private car, and as they entered the central room, they found Rigallo pacing up and down in something akin to rage.

"Hell, Cap, where have you been?" he snapped.

"What about it?"

"Bower came down from Headquarters and took Nelson up for a quiz."

MacBride tightened his jaw. "Why'd you let him?"

"How could I stop him. I'm only a dick."

"What's this?" put in Tate.

MacBride said, "Nelson's at Headquarters."

"I want to place that charge."

"All right," said MacBride; then to Rigallo, "You go along with Mr. Tate, Riggy."

They went out, and MacBride banged into his office. Kennedy was parked in his chair before his desk, immersed in solitaire.

"Out of my throne, Kennedy!"

"Just a minute, Mac. I've almost got this."

MacBride grabbed the back of the swivel chair, hauled it and Kennedy away from the desk, slid another into its place, and sat down. He studied the cards for a moment, made several swift moves, filled the suits and said, "Learn from me, Kennedy."

"That was good, Mac. How about two-handed poker."

"No. Busy."

"What doing?"

"Thinking."

"Bower came down and got Nelson."

"Don't I know it!"

Kennedy chuckled. "Bower's the Headquarters 'yes' man. Guess the Commissioner wanted to see Nelson, shake his hand, and tell him to go home."

"H'm." MacBride stood up, put on his coat and strode out.

Ten minutes later he entered Police Headquarters.

Commissioner Stroble regarded him through a screen of excellent cigar smoke.

"How about Nelson?" asked MacBride.

"We let him go," said the Commissioner.

"Let him go!" echoed MacBride.

"Why, certainly. No case at all, MacBride. We had a chap named Scoggins here, too. I weighed both testimonies. Scoggins was asleep. Nelson saw that one of the cables had slipped and was trying to fix it. Scoggins was vague. Don't bother with such small change, MacBride."

"Small change!" MacBride curled his lip. "If it was so small, why did Bower take Nelson from the precinct, and why did you bother with it?"

Stroble's eyes narrowed. "Remember, MacBride, I took you out of the Fifth, gave you another chance. Don't be a fool!"

"You're trying to make a fool out of me! I know the situation on the waterfront, and it's not small change. That guy Nelson is guilty as hell. And the outfit he works for is a damned sight guiltier!"

Stroble leaned forward, pursing his lips. "MacBride, I said it was small change. Now don't hand me an argument. Go back to your roost and forget about it. This interview is over."

MacBride went out with a low growl. He walked back to the station-house, certain now that trouble was breeding on the river. Small change! He cursed under his breath. He was very near the end of his tether. Time and time again someone in the machinery of the city government had tried to balk him.

In his office that day he had moments of black depression. He wondered if after all he were not beating his head against a stone wall. What was he? Only a common precinct captain, with strong ideas of his own. How could he hope to carry out his own straightforward plans when the Department sidetracked him?

Yet there was the strain of the hard in his blood. To give up now, to fall in line with the long column of grafters, would be a tremendous blow to his conscience—and to his stubborn pride. Rigallo and Doran would razz him. And Kennedy! And a lot of other men who were aware of his single-handed struggle against graft and corruption.

No, there was no backing out now. He had built a structure of two-fisted justice, escaped death, release from the Force, by the skin of his teeth. The game at this stage was far too interesting. He had wiped out some of the most notorious gangs in Richmond City, had made the political racketeers squirm, had driven some right out of office.

But still he had not got to the roots. Had the Commissioner before his appointment, been the drive wheel in the racket? And now, being in a position of vital importance, would he rebuild all that MacBride had knocked down? How big was he? How far could MacBride push him? Why had he permitted Nelson's release on such short notice?

Small change! Hell!

It was strange that a month should pass without an untoward murmur on the river. At times MacBride wondered if after all Nelson had been innocent. But then it wasn't like Rigallo to make such a raw blunder. He was not a detective who usually went in for small game.

An interesting and significant bit of news drifted in one morning. Kennedy, the inevitable, walked in on MacBride and said:

"What do you think, Mac?"

"What?"

"A Tate & Tate barge sank last night. One of their oldest. Just foundered, so the report goes, off the coast. Sprung a leak. Went down with one hundred thousand dollars' worth of copper wire. The barge captain was saved. The tug *Annie Tate* was towing, and saved him. Read what the *News-Examiner* says."

He scaled a newspaper on the table, and MacBride conned a terse editorial:

> Last night the Tate & Tate barge Number Two sank off the Capes. It is evident that this barge was sadly in need of repair. The sea was only moderately rough and the tug *Annie Tate* had good steerageway.
>
> A cargo valued as $100,000 was lost in fifty fathoms, and the barge captain, Olaf Bostad, is in the City Hospital suffering from exposure. It seems to us that there is a deplorable lack of efficiency somewhere. Why the Number Two, one of the first barges built for Tate & Tate, was allowed to go to sea, is beyond us.
>
> It seems incredible that a reputable company should place a man in jeopardy by sending him on a coastwise voyage in a barge of such ancient vintage. The company, of course, does not lose. The underwriters do. We no longer wonder why marine insurance is at such a premium, and why many underwriters refuse to insure coastwise barges.

"H'm," muttered MacBride.

"I wonder who paid for that," said Kennedy. "Tate & Tate are in hot water now, for sure. Watch the insurance company go into action!"

"And the waterfront bust wide open," said MacBride.

Indeed, the first rumble came on the following day, when not a single tug or barge of Tate & Tate moved. Captain Bower, of Headquarters, boomed into the station-house with orders from the Commissioner.

"MacBride, you've got to patrol the river," he said. "Use all your available men. Two cops on each pier where there's Tate & Tate shipping. The insurance company has refused to allow Tate & Tate to move until every barge and tug has been inspected. The city is also sending its own inspectors, and there's a complete tie-up."

"All right," nodded MacBride.

He called on his reserves, dispatched them to six different piers, and himself went down to the Tate & Tate general offices.

Young Hiram Tate was in high heat. "What do you think of this, MacBride? By God, can you beat it? That barge was overhauled only two months ago and the underwriters O.K.'d it. Now we're tied up. Not a thing allowed to move. We've got thousands of dollars' worth of freight that has to move—has to make trains, ships—and some of it's perishable. Hell, we'll go bankrupt!

"What happens now? Consignees and consignors are bellowing. But we can't move. We lose our contracts, and the movement of freight is taken over by other companies. And what company mainly? The Harbor Towing. God, what a blow below the belt this is!"

"We're putting men on the piers to prevent trouble," said MacBride.

But trouble broke. When a Harbor Towing tug and three lighters warped into Pier Eight to move perishable freight from a Tate & Tate shed, a fight started. Fists flew, and then

stones and canthooks. The police joined, and shots rang out, and one man was wounded before the outbreak was quelled.

But the feud had taken root and spread the length of the waterfront, and MacBride was here and there and everywhere, struggling for law and order.

The Commissioner called him and said, “Clamp the lid, MacBride. It looks as if Tate & Tate employ a lot of hoodlums. This can’t go on. Pitch ‘em all in jail if you have to.”

MacBride had been up most of that night, and he was weary. “If you’d get the inspectors on the job and make that insurance company snap on it, this would stop. I’m doing the best I can.”

“Keep up the good work, MacBride!” was Stroble’s parting shot.

MacBride slammed down the receiver, whirled and stared at Rigallo. “Now I know why I’ve been shifted here! I’m getting a beautiful kick in the slats! I’m told to ride Tate & Tate, and, Kennedy, way down in my heart I believe Tate & Tate is the goat!”

“Mac, I’m with you, you know. So is Doran.”

“Thanks, Riggy. It’s good to know.”

Reports came in continually from the river. All the reserves were out. Fights occurred every few hours—uptown—downtown.

MacBride slept at the station-house that afternoon, awoke at six, had hot coffee and a couple of hamburgers sent up, and prepared for another night. Tate & Tate were at the breaking point. The inspectors were taking their time, and the first barge that was looked over was held up for some minor detail that was not yet settled among the inspectors.

On the other hand, the Harbor Towing Company was reaping a harvest, taking over all the freight that Tate & Tate could not handle. And the Union men of the Harbor Towing, old enemies of the non-Union crowd of Tate & Tate, took every opportunity to bawl insults at the men whom circumstances had forced to a standstill.

Hiram Tate called MacBride on the telephone and yelled, “Look here, MacBride! You’ve got a good name in this lousy burg. What am I going to do? These pups from the Harbor Towing are getting away with murder. You can’t blame my men for fighting. I’ve bailed twenty out already. If this keeps up, if my floating equipment isn’t allowed to move, we’ll go bankrupt. It’s dirty, MacBride. There’s some underhand work somewhere. I tell you, if it keeps up, I’m going out on the river myself and bust the first Harbor Towing bum that opens his jaw!”

“Sit tight, Tate,” said MacBride. “I’ve got to maintain law and order.”

“Law and order, hell!” exclaimed Tate, and hung up.

Rigallo asked, “What’s the matter, Cap?”

“Tate’s sore. Can you blame him?”

“No.”

“Riggy, this is getting worse. There’s big money in it, and between you and me it looks as if the Harbor Towing is trying to wipe out Tate & Tate, their biggest competitors. And how they’re doing it! That sunken barge was just what they needed. Graft all around. Ten to one the underwriters were bribed. The *News-Examiner* was bribed. The city is being bribed.”

“D’ you ever stop to think, Cap, that the barge might have been monkeyed with?”

“You know, I wonder!”

The hours dragged by, with more reports coming in, and at midnight came a staggering report from one of the patrolmen stationed at Pier Fifteen.

"We just found a stiff, Captain."

"Who?"

"Guy named Nelson. We heard a shot and ran down the dock and found him dead in his barge. Right through the heart."

"Hold everything, Grosskopf. I'll be over."

MacBride hung up and looked at Rigallo. "Riggy, somebody plugged Alf Nelson of the Harbor Towing."

"God help Tate & Tate!"

"Let's go!"

4

FFICER TONOVITZ met MacBride and Rigallo at the entrance of Pier Fifteen.

"Grosskopf's on the barge," he said.

They strode down the covered pier, came out in the open, and saw Grosskopf standing outside the cabin door. MacBride and Rigallo jumped down to the barge. Nelson was lying on the floor, flat back, one arm flung across his chest, the other extended straight from his shoulder. A chair was overturned.

"Fight," ventured Rigallo. "Maybe not," said MacBride. "He might have been sitting on the chair, and jerked up when he was hit."

"Door and windows were closed," put in Grosskopf.

"Didn't find anything?"

"No."

MacBride went out and up to the dock, and found a knot of men hovering nearby, expectantly.

"You guys knew Nelson, didn't you?"

Most of them did.

"See anybody around here tonight?"

One replied, "I seen Gus Scoggins."

"Going or coming?"

"He must ha' been goin' to the barge. I seen him on this dock. Was about nine o'clock. He said, 'Hello, Joe.' And I said, 'Hello, Gus.' "

"You didn't see him go back?"

"Well, no. I didn't hang around. I was on the way to my own barge when I saw Gus."

"Who do you work for?"

"Harbor Towin'."

"Sure you're not tryin' to frame Scoggins?"

"Who? Me? No. I'm a' old timer. I know Gus for years. I don't figger he did anything."

"He might have," said another voice. "Him and Nelson ain't been good friends since Scoggins claimed Alf tried to cut him loose."

MacBride left the group and called Grosskopf. "Ring the morgue and have them get

Nelson. Tonovitz, you stay on this barge. Riggy, come with me."

MacBride and Rigallo went to the float dispatcher for Tate & Tate and got from him the position of Scoggins' barge. It was at Pier four, and ten minutes later they found it. No lights shone. MacBride boarded, tried the door, found it padlocked from the outside.

"He should be on board," remarked Rigallo.

"He should," agreed MacBride. "Gripes, if Scoggins did this, Tate & Tate will be swamped!"

They climbed back to the pier and accosted the patrolman on duty, O'Toole.

"You know Scoggins? Have you seen him?"

"Saw him about eight-thirty, Cap, leaving."

"When he comes back, hold him and ring the station-house. If he doesn't show up by the time you leave, call me and tell your relief to watch for him, too."

"O.K."

MacBride and Rigallo shot back to the station-house. Rigallo went home, and MacBride hauled out a blanket and curled up on a cot in one of the spare rooms.

By morning he had the medical examiner's report. The bullet had gone through Nelson's heart aslant and lodged in his spine. A thirty-two.

O'Toole had rung in with no word of Scoggins. MacBride called the patrolman at Pier Four, and found that Scoggins was still absent. He hung up, went down to the pier, picked up the harbor master for Tate & Tate, and had him open the door to the little cabin. Everything was in order. Scoggins' suitcase, clothes, and other odds and ends, were still there.

MacBride went back to the pier, and found Hiram Tate, just arrived.

"What do you think about this killing, MacBride?"

"Looking for Scoggins. Somebody saw him around Nelson's barge last night."

"This is a rotten break, MacBride! Do you think it was Scoggins?"

"It looks as if it might be. He hasn't showed up all night."

They walked back to the street, and then MacBride made for the barge that had been Nelson's home. Officer Pallanzo was on duty, and he was having his hands full.

"I can't get rid of her, Cap," he complained.

MacBride stood with arms akimbo and stared at Hilda Yonson, who sat on the dock beside the barge. Her hands were clasped about her knees, and she was rocking back and forth and moaning. Her yellow hair blew in coarse wisps across her hueless face. Her hat was askew.

"Alf… Alf…"

She was dazed. When MacBride spoke, it seemed she did not hear him. She rocked on—and on, staring with red-rimmed eyes.

"Look here, Hilda," MacBride said, bending down. "Come on. Don't sit around here. I'll take you home."

He shook her. She looked up, and her lips quivered. "You—you said you vass Alf's

friend. All de time you had Alf in de station-house."

"Forget that. I was doing my duty. Come on, Hilda, I want to get the man who killed Alf. I want you to help me get him."

"Ay vill keel him!" She doubled a fist and squared her jaw.

"No, you leave that to me. Let's go." He took her arm, urged her.

She rose and permitted MacBride to lead her from the barge. She walked with a steady, purposeful tread, her face grim.

MacBride found a room at one corner of the warehouse, and they entered it, Rigallo close behind.

"When did you last see Alf, Hilda?" asked MacBride.

"Ay see Alf last night."

"What did he say?"

"Ay didn't talk. Ay go down by de dock und Ay see Alf iss playin' cards vit two fal-lers. So Ay don't go in. Ay go home."

"You know the men?"

"No. Vun vass dressed like vat you call sheik. Ay looked in by de vindow. De odder vun vas dat fal-ler Scoggins."

"About what time?"

"Vas maybe half-past nine."

MacBride turned to Rigallo. "This looks queer, Riggy—Nelson and Scoggins playing cards."

"With another guy—yeah."

"Ay vill keel him, whoever it vass dat keeled Alf. O-o-o-o, my poor Alf!" she moaned, rocking on the chair.

"Listen, Hilda," put in Rigallo, "buck up. And don't do any killing. Leave that to us. We'll get this bum and he'll burn for it."

"Ay vill bet it vass dat Scoggins."

They took her home, where she lived with an elder sister, and then went over to the station-house.

"The Commissioner's been calling you, Cap," said Sergeant Flannery. "Wants to talk to you."

MacBride took the phone and called Headquarters, and the Commissioner said, "That Scoggins is a good lead, MacBride. Tail him and get him. He's the guy we want, all right."

"I'm not so sure," said MacBride.

"Get him, MacBride. Grill young Tate. Maybe Tate knows a lot about it. Maybe he knows where Scoggins is."

Hanging up, MacBride swore softly. "Riggy, they're sure out to crush Tate & Tate, and making no bones about it."

Sergeant Flannery knocked and came in. A little boy accompanied him.

Flannery said, "Kid, just came in with a note."

MacBride took a rumpled piece of brown wrapping paper, and read:

For Cap. MacBride, Second Police Precinct. I been took here and held. Looks like these guys are going to kill me or something. Get me out of it. I can't write more nom.

GUS SCOGGINS.

MacBride looked at the boy, who was standing on one foot, twisting a cap which he held in his hand.

"Where'd you get this, son?"

"I picked it up in the gutter on North Street."

"You know just where?"

"Yes."

MacBride stood up and put on his overcoat. "Come on, Riggy. Where's Doran?"

Flannery said, "Playing poker with the reserves."

"Call him."

MacBride and Rigallo pushed out into the central room and a moment later Doran appeared and joined them.

"We're going places, Tim. You heeled?"

"Yup."

"Then let's go. Come on, sonny."

5

acBRIDE flagged a taxi, and they all piled in. Ten minutes later they alighted and walked down North Street.

"It's on the next block," said the boy, "on the other side of the street. See that red brick house? I found it right in front of that, in the gutter."

"All right," said MacBride. "Here's a half-dollar. Run home."

The boy ran off and MacBride stopped. "Riggy, Tim, we've got to get Scoggins. The Commissioner wants him."

"I wonder if he really does," said Rigallo.

MacBride grinned. "I'll be doing my duty. He told me to get him."

They walked on, crossed the street and drew near the red brick house. An empty store was on the street level, windows soaped and pasted with *To Let* signs. Above this ranged two stories. North Street is a mongrel street. There are warehouses, garages, poolrooms, a few tenements.

"There's an alley," said Doran, pointing a few doors further on.

"Good idea," said MacBride. "We'll go around to the back."

They entered the alley, followed it to the rear, vaulted a couple of board fences and eventually found themselves in the yard back of the red brick house. A door that apparently led into the back of the store barred the way. There were two windows.

"We don't want to make any noise," said MacBride. "Cut the putty away from that top pane and we'll pry it out."

They used jack-knives, succeeded in removing the pane with a minimum of noise. MacBride reached in, unlocked the window, pushed it up. Then he crawled in. Doran and Rigallo followed, and they stood in an empty room littered with paper and old boxes.

"Upstairs, I guess," said MacBride, and opening a door, stepped into a musty hallway.

Each man carried one hand in his pocket, on his gun.

MacBride led the way up a flight of stairs. He stood on the first landing, looking around. Doran and Rigallo joined him. There were four doors along the side, and one at either end of the corridor.

MacBride whispered, “You guys park on the next stairway and watch. Quiet, now.”

They nodded and cat-footed off.

MacBride stood alone, deliberating. Now that he was here, what should he do? The situation presented some difficulties. Where was Scoggins? What room? How much of a gang was here? Where was the gang? Why hadn’t Scoggins been more explicit?

Questions? The answers would be arrived at only through action. He shrugged. Couldn’t stand here all day. Supposed he picked a door at random and knocked?

Well, try it. He did. Squared his shoulders, assumed an innocent expression and rapped on the nearest door. Whom should he ask for?…

The door opened and a man in an undershirt and trousers looked out.

“Hello,” said MacBride.

“Hello,” grunted the man.

“I’m a tenement-house inspector,” said MacBride. “I’d like to look through the rooms. Won’t take long.”

“What do you want to look for?”

“Just see about lights, fire exits. Won’t take long. Few minutes. Hate like hell to bother you, but the boss has been riding me.”

“Well, come in, then,” grunted the man.

MacBride entered, wondering what tenement-house inspectors were supposed to do. He took out a pencil, however, and a batch of old envelopes from his pocket. He made a few lines, looked very thoughtful, went to each of the two windows in the room, opened and closed them. The man in the undershirt watched him closely.

“Well, this room’s all right,” said MacBride. “Now the next.”

“Wait a minute,” grumbled the man, and entered the next room, closing the door behind him. MacBride heard subdued voices during the brief moment the door was open.

He stepped to the hall door, swung it open, caught Rigallo’s eye, and put a finger to his lip. Rigallo, hiding with Doran on the staircase, nodded and grinned. MacBride closed the door softly.

A second later the other door opened, and the man in the undershirt came back. With him was another man, a tall, slim, saturnine man smoking a cigarette through an ivory holder. He eyed MacBride with a cold stare.

“Who sent you here?” he clipped.

“My boss.”

“Well, come around some other time.”

“Can’t. I’m taking this block today.”

“Well, take this dump some other day.”

“What’s the idea?” shot back MacBride. “What do you suppose the boss will say if I take all the houses on this street except this one?”

“That’s your lookout. Here’s twenty-five bucks. Mark this place as okey.”

"Sorry," said MacBride.

"Then clear out."

MacBride didn't know how tenement-house inspectors acted in such a case, but he knew how a cop acted. "Now look here, mister," he said. "My job is to look these places over, and I'm going to look it over. Don't get snotty, either, or I'll condemn the damned joint right off the bat."

"You will, eh?"

"You said it."

"Who cares?"

"I don't," shrugged MacBride.

"And neither do I. Can that crap and on your way, buddy."

"Well, all right, then, if you want to get mean about it," said MacBride. "I'll hand in a bum report."

"Sure. Go ahead. I don't care."

MacBride put away his pencil and paper and pulled open the door, shoved his hand into his pocket, and stood there.

"Now I'll get mean," he ripped out. "Just like this!"

His gun jumped into view, and the two men gasped.

"Raise 'em high!" snapped MacBride; and over his shoulder, "Come on, boys."

But Doran and Rigallo were already beside him. "Frisk 'em," said MacBride.

Rigallo entered the room and approached the man in the undershirt, relieving him of an automatic. The other man snarled:

"What the hell kind of a stunt is this?"

"Shut up!" said MacBride. "Get your hands up."

He snatched a gun from the man's pocket and put it into his own.

"It's a frame-up!" yelled the man.

"Damn you, close your trap!" barked MacBride.

The door to the next room swung open. He caught a momentary glimpse of a group of startled faces. Then the door banged, as Doran leaped toward it and tried to keep it open.

"Hold everything, gang!" yelled the saturnine man.

A shot crashed, splintered the door.

Doran stepped back, leveled his gun and put three shots through the lock.

Rigallo handcuffed the two men together. MacBride took another pair of manacles and secured them to a waterpipe.

"You guys are dicks!" cried the saturnine man.

"God, but you're bright!" chuckled MacBride.

Somewhere below, glass crashed. Doran reloaded his gun. Rigallo fired a couple of shots through the door.

Footsteps were pounding up the stairway. MacBride jumped into the hall, his gun leveled. Two policemen appeared, guns drawn.

"Take it easy, boys," called MacBride. "Stay here in the hall. We've got some bums bottled up."

Even as he said this a door further down the hallway burst open and men rushed out. Revolvers blazed, and one of the policemen went down. MacBride fired and Doran joined him. Eight men swept down upon them like an avalanche. Rigallo came hurtling out of the room.

Doran sank under a blackjack. MacBride put two shots through the head of the man who had wielded it. A clubbed revolver skimmed along his skull and thudded on his shoulder. He twisted and clubbed his own gun, and broke a man's nose. Blood splashed over him.

Somebody reeled, balanced on the balustrade, and then pitched down into the hallway below. Somebody else kicked MacBride in the stomach while he was trying to reload. He doubled and fell to the floor, and another foot cut open his left ear.

Rigallo, holding the doorway of the room wherein the two men were manacled, put a slug in the back of the man who was kicking MacBride's head. The man fell over the captain and never moved once, until MacBride shoved him over and staggered to his feet.

Two men rushed Rigallo, and one swore in Italian. Rigallo snarled, "As one wop to another, back up!" The man struck with his blackjack. Rigallo dodged and blew out the man's stomach.

"Cripes!" choked the other.

"Stay back," warned Rigallo, "or I'll spill your guts, too."

Two more policemen rushed up the stairs, met two gangsters at the head, forced them back. Suddenly the shots ceased, and the hallway was strangely quiet. Six men, one of them a policeman, lay on the floor, dead. Three gangsters stood with their backs against the wall, disarmed, breathing thickly, one with a broken and bloody nose.

Rigallo still stood in the doorway. MacBride lifted up Doran, shook him.

"You all right, Tim?"

"Yeah-sure," mumbled Doran.

"Hold him," MacBride said to one of the policemen.

Then he turned toward the door, laid his hand on Rigallo's shoulder. "Riggy, this was a hell of a blow-out!"

"Sloppy," nodded Rigallo.

MacBride entered the room and looked at the two men manacled to the water-pipe.

"Well, you satisfied?"

The man in the undershirt said nothing. The other said, "No, are you?"

"Not yet."

MacBride entered the other room. A table was littered with bottles and glasses. He looked around, rubbing his jaw. He crossed and opened another door, looked into a bedroom. It was empty. He backed up, called Rigallo.

"You and Doran hunt for Scoggins. He must be hidden somewhere. Go right to the roof, if you have to."

They went out, and MacBride sampled a bottle of Three Star Hennessy. It was good stuff, warmed him up. He noticed a closet door, and with the bottle still in his hand, walked over and

grasped the knob. He pulled, but the door resisted, yet it was not locked. He dropped the bottle and drew his gun. Someone was in that closet, holding the door shut.

"Come out!" MacBride called.

There was not a murmur.

"Out, or I'll riddle the door!" said MacBride.

Still no answer.

"I'll count three," said MacBride. "Ready. *One*!" He marked time. "*Two*!" His gun steadied. "*Three*!"

His finger tightened on the trigger. He aimed low.

Bang! Bang!

Rigallo and Doran came in, with Scoggins between them.

"Found him, Cap," said Rigallo.

"Just a minute, Riggy," said MacBride. "I've found something else."

He waited. He saw the knob move.

"Atta boy!" he called. "Open it or I'll shoot higher. Ready!"

The door burst open and a wild-eyed man tottered out.

"Well!" exclaimed MacBride. "Greetings. Mr. Braun!"

"G-God!" stuttered Braun.

A new voice penetrated the room—"Is that Braun of the Harbor Towing, Mac?"

MacBride pivoted.

Kennedy of the *Free Press* was leaning in the doorway, tapping his chin with a pencil.

VI

Braun, that short, round, dark, nervous man, seemed to be swallowing hard lumps.

MacBride spoke to a policeman, "Ed, you shove those three bums in the hall into the next room with the other two."

"Right-o, Cap."

"Riggy and Tim, you stay in here with me," went on MacBride. "Kennedy, you can stay here on the condition that you don't publish anything unless you have my consent."

"Suits me, Mac."

MacBride rubbed his hands gingerly. "This will be interesting. Make yourselves at home, men—you, too, Braun, and you there, Scoggins. There's a bottle and glasses. Let's get clubby."

Braun was not in a clubby mood. He was emphatically nervous, and kept biting his thin red lips.

MacBride said, "Now, Scoggins, what happened?"

Scoggins had taken a drink. He wiped his mouth. "Gosh, I was scared. T' other afternoon me and Alf Nelson met in the lunchroom across

from Pier Ten. I said, 'Hello, Alf.' And he said, 'Hello, Gus.' Then I said, 'Look here, Alf, we know each other for years. We worked together. What's the sense o' bein' mean? I know you tried to cut me loose't'other night, but I'm willin' to forget it.' And Alf said, 'I been a big bum, Gus.' And I said, 'You been a fool, Alf. You never had much brains. You're lettin' some big guys talk you into doin' things. You'll get in trouble, Alf, if you don't look out.' So Alf looked kinda guilty, and he said, 'Yeah, I been a big bum, Gus. I been wan tin' to get some money ahead, so me and Hilda could get hitched. You and me been friends for years, Gus.' And I said, 'We sure have, Alf. And like one friend to another, I'd warn you to look out for them big buys. If you get in Dutch, they ain't goin' to help you.' So he said, 'I guess you're right, Gus. I been a dumb-bell.' I said, 'You sure have, Alf.' And he nodded and then said, 'Gus, come over my barge tomorrer night and have a game of pinochle like old times.' So I said I would, and I did.

"So I went over. We played for an hour, and then some guy came in, and Alf said, 'This is a friend, Gus. Call him Pete.' So I called him Pete and he called me Gus, but I didn't like him. He wasn't a waterfront man. Along about 'leven o'clock I figgered I better go, and Pete said, 'Me, too. I got a motorboat out here. I'll take you upriver.' I said, 'Thanks,' and we went.

"There was another guy waitin' in the boat, and when we got out in the river they jumped me. I was knocked out. When I come to I was in a room upstairs. I was sore. I wonder if Alf double-crossed me."

"Alf is dead," said MacBride.

Scoggins squinted. "What!"

"Was killed about an hour after you left."

"Dead!"

"Uhuh."

"But who did it?"

"I don't know—yet." MacBride turned to Braun. "Maybe you know."

Braun started. His eyes blinked. He moistened his lips. "Captain, I seem in a peculiar position. Unfortunately, circumstances are against me. I believe I'll not say anything until I've thought things out more."

"Until you've seen a lawyer?" sneered MacBride.

"Until he's seen the Commissioner," sliced in Kennedy.

It was like dropping a bomb. MacBride swung on him. Braun shuddered, clenched his hands, pursed his lips. Rigallo tapped the floor with his toe. A long moment of silence enveloped the room. Kennedy smiled whimsically, one eyebrow slightly arched.

MacBride said to Rigallo, "Bring in those guys we hitched to the pipes inside."

Rigallo grinned, entered the adjoining room, returned a minute later with the saturnine man and the man in the undershirt. The saturnine man had tightened his dark face, and his eyes were two black slots of malevolence, his lips were flattened against his teeth.

Scoggins said, "That's the guy we played cards with. He's the guy took me for a motorboat ride."

"The guy that killed Nelson, eh?" put in Kennedy. "Know him, Mac?"

"Not yet."

"He's from Chicago, if I've got my mugs right. Pete Redmond."

"Well, what about it?" snarled the man.

"Soft pedal," said MacBride. "I'm going to plant you for a long while, buddy."

"Like hell you are!" snapped Redmond.

"Sh!" put in Braun.

Redmond turned to him. "What's the matter with you? You look yellow around the gills. Come on, tell this guy who we are. I can't hang around here all day. I got a date. Call the Commissioner on the telephone."

Braun turned a shade whiter. "Sh! Don't be a fool, Redmond!" he gulped.

"Well, then, let's go. He can't hold us. Telephone the Commissioner. I tell you, I got a date."

MacBride said, "Braun, do you want to make a telephone call?"

Braun shifted nervously, wore a pained look.

"Go ahead," urged Redmond. "Call him up."

Braun went over to the telephone, called a number. "Hello, George," he said. "Listen, George… Huh? You know… Well, what are you going to do?… Yeah, Pete is here… Well, how could I help it?… Well, don't bawl *me* out, George… All right."

He hung up, said, "He'll be right over."

Kennedy licked his lips. "Hot diggity!"

Braun was pale. Redmond scowled under MacBride's steady gaze and said, "Think you're wise, eh? I get a great kick out of you, big boy. I didn't think they came that dumb."

"You'll find how dumb I am," said MacBride.

"Wait till the Commissioner comes," smirked Redmond.

"Ah, just wait," said Kennedy.

So everybody waited. Thirty minutes passed, and then an hour.

Braun said, "I wonder what's keeping him."

"He'd better hurry," said Redmond. "I got a date."

"Oh, damn your date!" cried Braun.

"Yeah?" snarled Redmond.

MacBride took a drink and said, "Pipe down."

The telephone rang. Rigallo was nearest and took the call. When he hung up, he said, "We should all go over to Headquarters."

"Now why the hell should we go to Headquarters?" snapped Redmond. "I'm not going."

"Let's go," said MacBride.

"I don't savvy this at all," complained Redmond.

"It will be all right," soothed Braun.

"It better be," said Redmond.

MacBride called the morgue, said, "There are a lot of stiffs at 46 North Street. Better come up and collect 'em."

He went into the next room, and told one of the policemen to remain with the dead until the men from the morgue arrived. To the others he said, “We’re taking the rest over to Headquarters.”

MacBride, Rigallo and Doran and the three policemen gathered the six gangsters together and marched them down the stairs. All were handcuffed, including Braun, who stumbled as he walked. MacBride hauled him along roughly. Scoggins walked beside Kennedy.

Below, a crowd of people swarmed on the sidewalk outside the door. MacBride chased them as he led the way. Rigallo and Redmond were behind him. They marched down the street, two by two.

“I don’t like this,” complained Redmond. “I don’t see why the hell we have to go to Headquarters.”

“Be quiet,” called back Braun.

“I tell you, guy, if—”

Bang!

VII

EDMOND sagged, belched blood.

Bang!

Braun stopped in his tracks, buckled, groaned.

“Duck!” yelled MacBride, and dragged Braun into the nearest hallway.

Rigallo lugged Redmond into a fruit store.

Four shots rang out, and the four gangsters behind crumpled.

Kennedy and Scoggins dodged into a hardware store as a shot smashed the window beside them.

MacBride had disengaged himself from Braun. Braun was dead.

Rigallo joined the captain and said, “Redmond’s cooked, too. What the hell do you suppose happened anyway?”

“God knows, Riggy! Those shots came from that store across the way. Come on!”

He rushed into the street, blew his whistle. Doran came on the run, followed by the policemen. Doran said, “Every guy was picked off, Cap, and there was some straight shooting! That store—”

“Yeah. Let’s go,” clipped MacBride, and crossed the street on the run.

The store was empty, but they broke through the door and cascaded into the interior. The men bunched around MacBride.

“They’ve cleared out—through the back! Come on!” he said.

He led the way into the rear, and they found a back door open and thundered out into a yard. A fence barred the way, but they vaulted over it, crashed through the back door of another house and milled in a dark hallway.

MacBride rushed headlong, came to another door, yanked it open and looked out upon Jackson Street. He started to step out, when a machine-gun stuttered and the door

frame splintered. Rigallo yanked him back, slammed the door.

"Don't be a fool, Mac!"

They heard the roar of a motor. It diminished in a few seconds. MacBride again opened the door, stepped out, looked up and down the street, said over his shoulder, "Come on."

His men came out warily. The street was empty—not a car, not a person in sight.

"Dammit!" muttered MacBride.

"Well, why worry?" asked a policeman. "One gang against another. That's a good way of getting rid of rats."

"It sure is," said another cop.

MacBride grumbled.

Kennedy said, "Come on, Mac. I've got several ideas."

"I'm going to Headquarters," growled MacBride. "Riggy, you and Doran go back to North Street and see the morgue bus gets those bums."

He turned on his heel and strode down the street. Kennedy fell in step beside him.

"Mac, we're near the end. It won't be long now. I figure you're just outside the Big Guy's doorstep."

MacBride made no comment. His jaw was hard, and his eyes glittered.

They entered Police Headquarters. Kennedy lingered at the desk while MacBride went on to the Commissioner's office. But the Commissioner was not in. MacBride rejoined Kennedy at the desk, prodded him and marched out.

"What's the matter?" asked Kennedy.

"He's not in."

"Where'd he go?"

"Left no word."

They stopped on the wide steps outside, and MacBride lit a cigar.

A big black limousine drew up, and Commissioner Stroble alighted. He stood speaking with someone who remained in the tonneau behind drawn curtains. Then he suddenly spun around and saw MacBride and Kennedy standing on the steps. He spoke hastily in an undertone and stepped back to the sidewalk.

The car started off. Kennedy ran down the steps, called, "Hey, how about a lift?"

The Commissioner looked startled. Kennedy jumped to the running-board, but the car jerked ahead, and he slipped, fell, rolled into the gutter.

Stroble mounted the steps, eyes narrowed. "What do you want, MacBride?"

"Just wanted to see you."

"Come up to my office."

As MacBride followed Stroble in, he turned and saw Kennedy standing on the sidewalk, grinning.

In the Commissioner's office, a tenseness became apparent. Stroble took off his overcoat and sat down.

"Well, MacBride."

"I thought you were coming over to North Street."

"I was. But when I reached the street there was a gun-fight going on. I'm too old for gun-fights, MacBride."

"Braun was killed. He was a friend of yours."

Stroble sighed. "Poor Charlie. Yes, he was a friend of mine, from school days. What kind of a mess did he get into?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said MacBride. "I caught him with a bad gang. A bird named Pete Redmond, from Chicago, and some other guns."

"My!" exclaimed Stroble. "That was strange. Charlie shouldn't have done that."

"He was sure you could help him," gritted MacBride.

"Yes, for old times' sake. Months ago he came to me and said Tate & Tate were riding him. Trade was falling off. He wanted more police protection. Well, I tried to make it easy for him. You'd do the same, MacBride, for an old friend. I didn't know he'd gone bad."

MacBride restrained himself with an effort. Deep in his heart he knew that Braun had been double-crossed, yet what could he do? There was no evidence.

Stroble was saying, "It was strange, too, how that other gang popped up. Why do you suppose they committed such wholesale slaughter?"

MacBride blurted out, "It looks to me like a double-cross."

Stroble blinked. "I say, now, do you really think so?"

"Yes."

"H'm. That is possible. Poor Charlie! He was a good chap, MacBride, but a bit of a fool. No clue to who did it?"

"No. All the cops ran to North Street when the shooting started. The gang, after they killed Braun, and the others, beat it through to Jackson Street and made a clean getaway. We tried to follow, but I damned near got plastered by a machine-gun. We had to hide."

"Sensible, MacBride—very sensible. Personally, I believe that in such a situation, you should be careful. Gangs often destroy each other, and take that task off a policeman's hands. Of course, we must spread an alarm. But poor Charlie! I didn't think he'd take advantage of me—of a good thing, MacBride."

"Scoggins, you know, was kidnapped and held by Braun's gang."

"Goodness, now why do you suppose they did that?"

MacBride leaned forward, barbed every word—"So that we'd think Scoggins killed Nelson. So that red tape would tie up Tate & Tate a little longer, drive them nearer to bankruptcy, give the Harbor Towing a big lead."

"Could that be possible!" exclaimed the Commissioner. "And there I was trying to do Charlie a good turn, for old times' sake! It wasn't fair of Charlie. Do you think so, MacBride?"

"I don't know."

"H'm. Well, run along. I've some work to do. File the report on this when you find time. Good luck."

MacBride almost lost control of himself. His fingernails dug into his palms. A grunt escaped his lips.

The Commissioner looked up. “Eh?”

MacBride snapped, “Good day,” and banged out.

In the street he found Kennedy, and the reporter said, “You look fit to be tied, Mac.”

“I am! I’m stumped!”

“Mac”—Kennedy took his arm and steered him down the street—”Mac, buck up. Before very long you’re either going to get the Big Guy—or he’ll get you.”

“What do you mean, Kennedy?”

“I know things. Come on over to the station-house.”

They tramped into MacBride’s office. Kennedy closed the door and locked it. He rubbed his hands together, smiled his tired, whimsical smile. He slid upon the desk, and tapped the blotter in front of MacBride.

“Get this, Mac, and think it over,” he said. “I’ve been keeping a few things under my hat. Yesterday I made a discovery. Why do you think Stroble was giving the Harbor Towing all the breaks?”

“Braun was a friend of his.”

“Nonsense! Stroble is a big stockholder—silent one, you know—in the Harbor Towing.”

“How do you know?”

“I found out. I went to that lousy brokerage firm of Weber & Baum. They used to handle Stroble’s business, but he broke with them, and they got sore. In confidence Baum told me that Stroble practically owns the Harbor Towing. And look here. The Mayor owns the Atlas Trucking Corporation—under cover—and the one is practically linked with the other.

“I’ve got the whole thing doped out, Mac. Pete Redmond was head of Stroble’s private gang, and Braun had to move as he was told. When they balled things up that way, and when you flopped on their big parade—and I turned up at the right moment—the Commissioner knew that he was cooked.

“You had Braun and Redmond cold. Even Stroble, with all his power, couldn’t get them clear. So what did he do? Wiped them out! Double-crossed them! Got another gang to kill every one of them as you marched down the street.”

“Good God!” groaned MacBride. “I believe you, Kennedy. I’m sure you’re right. But the Mayor—man—the Mayor! You’re sure he’s mixed up in it?”

“I’ll say this, Mac. I’ll bet my shirt that the gang that wiped out Redmond was the Mayor’s own. Stroble went to him, told him the fix he was in. The Mayor knew that if Braun and Redmond were caught, they’d squeal on the Commissioner and that Stroble would yap on the Mayor. So he lent Stroble his gang.”

“But who is the Mayor’s gang?”

“That’s for you to find out.”

“And you think the Mayor is the Big Guy?”

“If he isn’t, I’m all wrong.”

MacBride snorted. “Hell, Kennedy, it’s incredible. I never thought much of him, but—”

"Look here, Mac," cut in Kennedy. "The Atlas Trucking Corporation has been having hard sledding, too. The Harbor Towing will have to shut up. Tate & Tate will get that concession at Seaboard Basin. But the Colonial Trucking Corporation is a subsidiary of Tate & Tate, and I'll bet that before long this trade war will be carried toward that end."

"If it is, Kennedy—"

"You'll find a hard nut to crack."

"I'll crack it or croak."

Kennedy lowered his voice. "I didn't tell you, Mac, who was in that limousine I tried to hop."

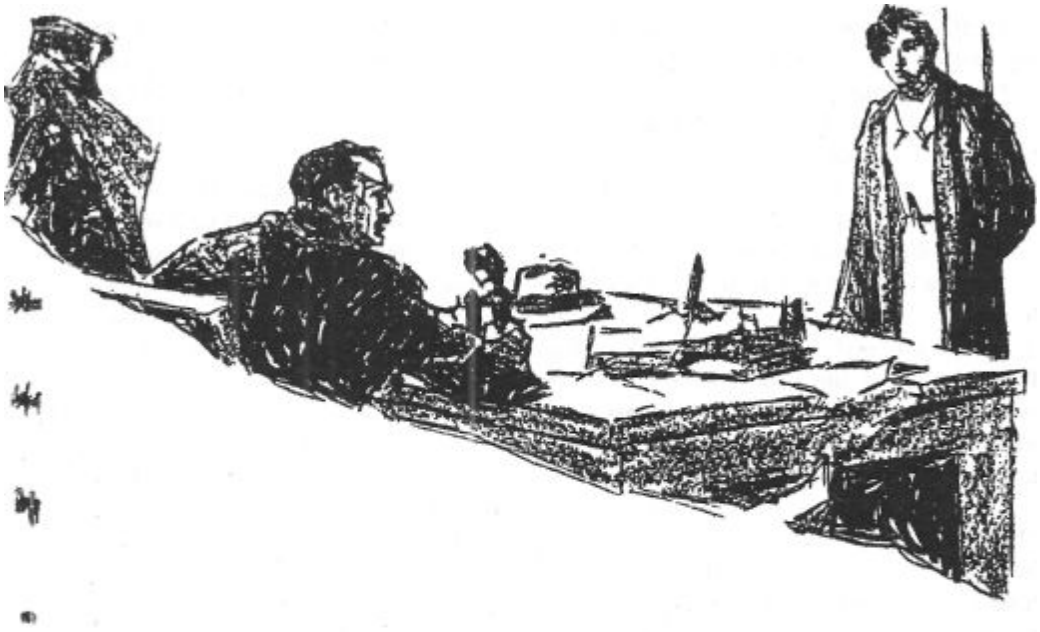
Their eyes met, MacBride's wide and blunt, Kennedy's narrowed and smiling.

"Who, Kennedy?"

"Don't you know?"

"You mean, the…"

"Sure," nodded Kennedy. "The Mayor!"



Graft

Frederick Nebel

1

POLICE CAPTAIN Steve MacBride, elbow on desk, chin on knuckles, looked down along his nose at the open dictionary, and concentrated his gaze on the word "graft." Now graft is a word of various meanings, and the definitions, as MacBride discovered, were manifold. But the definition that attracted and held his eyes longest, was clean-cut, crisp and acutely to the point:

> Acquisition of money, position, etc., by dishonest, unjust, or parasitic means.

His lips moved. "Parasitic. Humph! That's what they are, parasites!"

He sighed, creaked back in his swivel chair, and stared absently at the night-dark window. Cold out. The panes rattled. The wind hooted through the alley. More distant, it keened shrilly over housetops, whinnied through the complicated network of radio aerials. Even the poor had radios—bought tubes and what-not and went without shoes.

But graft. Parasitic. Parasites in the Town Hall. Hell, why hadn't he taken up plumbing, after his father? You could straighten out a bent pipe, plug a leak. But, as a police captain, with a wife and a daughter to support, and three thousand still due on that new bungalow in Grove Manor…

He banged shut Webster's masterpiece with a low growl, got up and took a turn up and down the room. Straight was MacBride—morally and physically. Square-shouldered, neat, built of whip-cord, hard bone, tough hide. His face was long, rough-chiselled, packed well around cheek and jaw. His mouth was wide and firm, and his eves were keen, windy—they could lacerate a man to the core.

He ran the Second Police Precinct of Richmond City. His frontiers touched the railroad yards and warehouses, plunged through a squalid tenement district and then suddenly burst into the bright lights of theatres, hotels, nightclubs. It was the largest precinct territorially in Richmond City. It was also the toughest.

Beyond the rooftops, a bell tolled the hour. Midnight. MacBride looked at his watch. Home. He could catch the last street car out to Grove Manor. Stifling a yawn, he walked to a clothes tree and took down his conservative gray coat and his conservative gray hat. He had one arm in his coat when the door opened and Sergeant Flannery, bald as a billiard ball, poked in.

"Just a minute, Cap. Girl outside pestering me—"

"Why pass the buck?" MacBride had his coat on. "I'm going home, Sergeant."

"But I can't get rid of her. She wants to see you."

"Me? Nonsense. You'll do for a sob case, Flannery. I mind the last sob sister you pawned off on me. Was hard up for a drink, the little tramp. Widowed mother and all that crap. Bah!"

"This one's different, Cap. Married a little over a year. Left her kid, three months old, home with her old lady. Name of Saunders. Lives over on Haggerty Alley. Damn near bawling. Wants to see you."

"Well"—MacBride started to put on his hat, but changed his mind and flung it on the desk— "send her in."

Overcoat partly buttoned, he dropped into the swivel chair and sighed after the manner of a man who has to listen, day in and day out, to tales of woe, of stolen cats, strayed dogs, blackened eyes, and broken promises. Well, another wouldn't kill him…

The girl came in timidly. She wore no hat, and her coat was a cheap thing, and she looked cold and forlorn and afraid. Pity—MacBride claimed there was not an ounce of it in his makeup—prompted him to say:

"Take that chair by the radiator. Warmer."

"Thank you."

Pretty kid. Young, pale, brown-eyed, hatless, and hair like spun copper. A mother. Haggerty Alley. God, what a draughty, drab hole!

"Well?"

"I came to you, Captain, because Jimmy—he's my husband—because Jimmy always says, 'MacBride, the gent runs the Second, is one reason why there ain't more killings in this neighborhood.' "

MacBride was on guard. He hated compliments. But, no, this wasn't salve. Her lower lip was quivering.

"Go on, madam."

"Well, I feel funny, Mr. MacBride. I feel scared. Jimmy ain't come home yet. I've been reading things in the newspaper about some trouble in the trucking business. Jimmy drives a big truck between Richmond City and Avondale—that's thirty miles. He leaves at one and gets back to the depot at nine and he's always home at ten. He's been carting milk from Avondale, you know—for the Colonial Trucking Company."

MacBride's eyes steadied with interest. He leaned forward. "What makes you afraid, Mrs. Saunders?"

"Well, I was reading the paper only the other night, about this trouble in the trucking business, and Jimmy said, he said, 'Wouldn't surprise me if I got bumped off some night.' You know, Mr. MacBride, only last month one of the drivers was shot at."

"H'm." MacBride's fingers tapped on his knee. "Don't worry, Mrs. Saunders. Everything's all right. Truck might have broken down."

"I phoned the depot, and they said that, too. But the drivers always phone in if they're broke down. Jimmy ain't phoned in. The night operator was fresh. He said, 'How do I know where he is?' So I hung up."

"Listen, you go right home," recommended MacBride. "Don't worry. They don't always break down near a telephone. Run home. Want to catch cold chasing around the street? Go on, now. I'll locate Jimmy for you, and send a man over. Got a baby, eh?"

Her eyes shone. "Yes. A boy. Eyes just like Jimmy's."

MacBride felt a lump in his throat, downed it. "Well, chase along. I'll take care of things."

"Thank you, Mr. MacBride."

She passed out quietly; closed the door quietly. Altogether a quiet, reticent girl. He stood looking at the closed door, pictured her in the street, rounding the windy corner, with shoulders hunched in her cheap coat—on into Haggerty Alley, dark, gloomy hole.

Jerking himself out of the reverie, he grabbed up the telephone, asked Information for the number of the night operator at the Colonial Trucking Company's River Street depot. He tapped his foot, waiting for the connection.

"Hel-lo-o," yawned a voice.

"Colonial?""

"Yup."

"That driver Saunders. Heard from him yet?"

"Cuh-ripes!" rasped the voice. "Who else is gonna call about that guy? No, he ain't showed up, and he ain't called, and if you wanna know any more, write the president."

"I'll come down there and poke you in the jaw!" snapped MacBride.

"Aw, lay off that boloney—"

"Shut up!" cut in MacBride. "Give me the route Saunders takes in from Avondale."

"Say, who the hell are you?"

"MacBride, Second Precinct."

"Oh-o!"

"Now that route, wise guy."

He picked up a pencil, listened, scribbled, said, "Thanks," and hung up.

Then he took the slip of paper and strode out into the central room. Sergeant Flannery was dozing behind the desk, with a half-eaten apple in his pudgy hand.

"Sergeant!"

Flannery popped awake, took a quick bite at the apple, and almost choked.

"Chew your food," advised MacBride, "and you'll live longer. Here, call the booth at Adams Crossing. We're looking for a Colonial truck, number C-4682, between Avondale and here. Call the booths at Maple Street and Bingham Center. Those guys have bicycles. Tell 'em to start pedaling and ring in if they find any trace. Brunner—you can locate him at the Ragtag Inn. He hangs out there between twelve and one, bumming highballs. Tell him to fork his motorcycle and start hunting."

He paused, thought. Then, "Where's Doran and Rigallo?"

"Stepped out about eleven. Down at Jerry's, shooting pool. Should I flag 'em?"

"No."

MacBride turned on his heel, entered his office and kicked shut the door. He sat down, bit off the end of a cigar, and lit up. He hoped everything was all right. Poor kid—baby three months old—Haggerty Alley—eyes like Jimmy's. Bah! He was getting sentimental. Did a man get sentimental at forty?

The door opened. Kennedy, of the *Free Press*, drifted in. A small, slim man, with a young-old face, and the whimsical, provocative eyes of the wicked and wise.

"Cold, Mac. Got a drink?"

MacBride pulled open a drawer. "Help yourself."

Kennedy hauled out a bottle of Dewar's and poured himself a stiff bracer—downed it neat. He slid onto a chair, coat collar up around his neck, and lit a cigarette. The cigarette bobbed in one corner of his mouth as he said:

"Anything new about this trucking feud?"

"Not a thing."

Kennedy smiled satirically. "The Colonial Trucking Company versus the Atlas Forwarding Corporation. Hot dog!"

"Take another drink and breeze, Kennedy."

"Cold out. Warm here. Say, Mac, look here. What chance has the Colonial against the Atlas when the Atlas is owned—oh, privately, sure!—by the Mayor? Funny, how those inspectors swooped down on the Colonial's garage last week and condemned five trucks as unfit for service and unsafe to be on the public highways. Ho—protecting the dear, sweet public! D'you know the Atlas is worth five million dollars?"

"Shut up, Kennedy!"

"Funny, how that driver was shot at last week. He was going to tell something. Then he turned tail. Who threatened him? Or was he paid? The new State's Attorney, good chap, could get only negative replies out of him. Hell, the guy got cold feet! Then he disappeared. This State's Attorney is ambitious—too clean for this administration. He'll get the dirty end, if he doesn't watch his tricks. So will a certain police captain."

MacBride bit him with a hard stare. Kennedy was innocently regarding the ceiling.

"Some day," he went on, "or some night, one of these drivers isn't going to get cold feet. I pity the poor slob!"

Sergeant Flannery blundered in, full of news.

"Brunner just rang in. Found the truck. Turned upside down in a gully 'longside Farmingville Turnpike. Milk cans all over the place. Driver pinned underneath. Brunner can't

get him out, but he says the guy's dead. He's sent for a wrecking crew, nearest garage. Farmingville Turnpike, two miles west of Bingham Center."

MacBride was on his feet, a glitter in his windy blue eyes. Haggerty Alley—eyes like Jimmy's. Hell!

"Haul out Hogan," he clipped, "and the flivver." He buttoned his coat, banged out into the central room, fists clenched.

Kennedy was at his elbow. "Let's go, Mac."

"It's cold out, Kennedy," said MacBride, granite-faced.

"Drink warmed me up."

No use. You couldn't shake this news-hound. Prying devil, but he knew his tricks.

Outside, they bundled their coats against the ice-fanged wind, and waited.

The police flivver came sputtering out of the garage, and the two men hopped in.

MacBride said, "Shoot, Hogan!"

2

HAVE you ever noticed how people flock to the scene of an accident, a man painting a flagpole, or a safe being lowered from a ten-story window?

MacBride cursed under his breath as, the flivver rounding a bend on Farmingville Turnpike, he saw up ahead dozens of headlights and scores of people. A bicycle patrolman was directing traffic, and the flivver's lights shone on his bright buttons and shield. Automobiles lined either side of the road. People moved this way or that. One pompous old fellow, with a squeaky voice, remarked that truck drivers were reckless anyhow, and served him right for the spill.

MacBride stopped on the way by, glared at the man. "Did you see this spill?"

"No-oh, no, no!"

"Then shut your trap!"

The captain was thinking of Haggerty Alley, and his tone was bitter. He moved on, and Motorcycle Patrolman Brunner materialized out of the gloom and saluted.

"Right down there, Cap. Guy's dead, and the truck's a mess. Can hardly see it from here."

"How'd you spot it?"

"I went up and down this pike twice, and the second time I noticed how the macadam is scraped. The guy skid bad, and you can see the marks. Closed cab on the truck, and he couldn't jump."

"Wrecker here yet?"

"No—any minute, though. Hoffman's handling traffic."

"Give me your flashlight. Go out with Hoffman and get these cars moving."

"Right."

MacBride took the flash and started down the embankment. Kennedy, huddled in his overcoat, followed. The way was steep, cluttered with boulders, blanched bushes; and as they descended, they saw turned earth and split rocks, where the truck had taken its headlong tumble.

Then they saw the truck, a twisted heap of wood and metal. A ten-ton affair, boxed like a moving van. But the truck had crashed head-on into a huge boulder, and the radiator, the hood, the cab and the cargo were all jumbled together. And somewhere beneath this tangled mass lay the driver.

Kennedy sat down on a convenient stump and lit a cigarette. MacBride walked around the wreck, probing with his flashlight. The beam settled on an arm protruding from beneath the snarled metal. Bloody—the blood caked by the cold.

He snapped out the flash, stood alone in the chill darkness, quivering with suppressed rage. The wind, whistling across the open fields, flapped his coat about his legs. Probably that girl was still sitting up, with her slippered feet in the oven of the kitchen stove, and her wide, sad eyes fixed on the clock. Brutal thing, death. It not only took one, but stung others. He wondered if there were any insurance, and thought not. Good thing, insurance. He carried twenty thousand, double indemnity, in case of accident. Could a guy in the Second Precinct die any other way but through an accident? Or was getting a slug in your back by a coked wop, death from natural causes?

A broad beam of light leaped down into the rocky gully.

"Wrecker," said Kennedy.

MacBride nodded, watched while several men came weaving down the slope.

"Cripes!" muttered one, upon seeing the wreck.

Another said, "Hell, Joe, we can never haul this out. Need a derrick."

"Well," said MacBride, "you've got axes. Hack away enough junk so you can get the man out."

MacBride stood back, hands in pockets, chin on chest. Axes flashed, rang. Crow-bars heaved, grated.

Brunner came down and said, "Morgue bus just came, Cap."

They got the body out, and one of the men became sick at his stomach. Another—case-hardened—chuckled, said, "Hell, buddy, you should ha' been in the war!" War! This was war—guerrilla warfare! War of intimidation!

They put a blanket over the dead man, laid him on a stretcher, carried him up over the hill and slid him into the morgue bus.

"I want the report as soon as possible," MacBride said to the man from the morgue.

The bus roared off into the night.

MacBride and Kennedy climbed into the police flivver. It was a bleak, cold ride back to the precinct.

The captain, without a word, went straightway into his office, uncorked the bottle of Dewar's and downed a stiff shot. He rasped his throat, stood staring into space.

Kennedy drifted in, espied the bottle, rubbed his hands together gingerly. "B-r-r! Cold out."

MacBride turned, eyed him, then waved toward the bottle. "Go ahead."

"Thanks, Mac."

Alone, MacBride went out into the black, windy street, turned a corner, crossed the street and entered Haggerty Alley. He stopped before

a drab, three-story dwelling. Aloft, one lighted window stared into the darkness. He drummed his feet on the cold pavement, then suddenly—pushed into the black hallway, snapped on his flash, and ascended the worn staircase.

Third floor. One lighted transom. He knocked. The door opened. That pale young face, wide, questioning eyes. Shoulders wrapped in a plaid shawl.

"Come… in."

MacBride went in. Yes, the kitchen, and an old woman sitting before the open oven of the stove, and clothes drying on a line above the stove. Faded wallpaper, hand-me-down furniture, warped ceiling. Cracked oilcloth on the floor. Neat, clean—poverty with its face washed.

The girl knew. Oh, she knew! Her breath, bated for a long moment, rushed out.

"Is he… ?"

MacBride stood like an image of stone. "Yes. Bad wreck."

She wilted, like a spring flower suddenly—overcome by an unexpected frost. The old woman moved, extended a scrawny arm.

"Betty!"

The girl reeled, spun, and buried her face in her mother's lap. The mother cradled her in ancient arms.

MacBride wanted to dash out. But he held his ground, and something welling from the depths of him melted the granite of his chiseled face. The old woman looked up, and though her eyes were moist, there was a certain grimness in her expression. Age is strong, mused MacBride. It meets fate with an iron jaw.

The old woman, looking at him, shook her head slowly, as if to imply that this was life, and we either died and left others to mourn, or mourned while others died.

MacBride put on his hat, backed toward the door, opened it softly. He bowed slightly, and without a word, departed.

He was a little pale when he reached the station-house. Doran and Rigallo, his prize detectives, and four or five reserves were hanging about the central room, and Kennedy, his coat collar still up to his ears, was leaning indolently against the wall and blowing smoke circles.

MacBride nodded to Doran and Rigallo and strode into his office. Kennedy tried to edge in but MacBride closed the door in his face. Doran hooked one leg over a corner of the desk and Rigallo stood jingling loose change in his pocket.

He said, "Trouble, eh, Cap?"

"Plenty!" MacBride bit off.

"Was the guy shot?"

"No telling yet. Too messed up to see. That's the morgue's job. We'll get news soon. But I'm willing to bet my shirt the guy's been done in. If he has, I'm going to bust loose and drive the Atlas Corporation to the wall."

Doran grunted. "Fine chance, with that bum of a mayor back of it. How the hell did he ever get in?"

"Don't be dumb," said Rigallo "That last election was a farce. All the polls in the Fourth and Fifth wards were fixed. Guys voted twice, and the polls committee scrapped a lot of votes for the opposition because of some lousy technicality—illegibility, unreadable signatures

and all that crap. Who votes in this city? The better element yap at conditions and turn up their noses and don't even go near the polls. The bums, the bootleggers, the blockheads and gunmen vote! And the New Party sends loud-mouthed guys to ballyhoo the mill and river bohunks during lunch-hour, and under-cover guys go around near the employment agencies, the bread-lines, and the parks. They find guys out of work and up against it, and they slip 'em a ten-dollar bill to vote. The Atlas Corporation employs eight hundred men, and they vote right or lose their jobs, and their wives, mothers and the whole damned family are dragged to the polls. Now d'you wonder why we have this bum of a mayor?"

MacBride said, "Sounds like Kennedy."

"It is," replied Rigallo. "Kennedy and I have the whole thing thrashed out."

The telephone rang. MacBride picked it up, muttered his name, and listened. When he put the instrument down, he sucked in his breath and curled his lip.

"Poisoned," he said. "Saunders, the driver, was poisoned. A stuff that he could drink and it wouldn't have any effect for an hour. Then it hits a man like a stroke of paralysis. That's how it hit Saunders."

Doran said, "Must have stopped at a road-house for a snifter and got poisoned liquor."

"Just that," nodded MacBride. "I'll find that roadhouse. Some pup is going to hang for this, just as sure as God made little green apples!"

"Remember, Cap, the mayor," put in Doran.

MacBride doubled his fist. "I'll bring it right to his doorstep if I have to, and I'd like to see the bum try to can me. I'm sick and tired of these conditions! I'm going to put a dent in the Atlas Corporation, and wipe out this graft, this dirty, rotten corruption."

"They'll bump you off, Mac."

"I'll take the chance! I'm insured for twenty thousand, and my plot in the cemetery is paid for!"

It took a tough man to run the Second.

3

NEXT day the noon edition of the *Free Press* gave the wreck and the death of Saunders a frontpage column. It recited the details in its customary offhand manner, giving the place, the approximate time, name of the deceased, and financial loss. It wound up with the non-committal statement that the police were investigating the matter, but did not say why.

MacBride, reading it over his coffee, at his home in Grove Manor, was a little disgruntled at its apparently disinterested attitude. But, turning the pages, his eye rested on the editorial columns, and particularly on an item labeled,

CRIME-CORRUPTION

Crime. We've always had it. It is a disease, recurring every so often, like smallpox, diphtheria, and scarlet fever. It lays waste, like any and all of these diseases, and causes suffering, misery and despair.

And on the other hand, wealth, affluence, power. To whom? Why, to those, quite often in high place, who like

parasites, feast avidly upon the meaty morsels gathered by vultures who swoop in the dark, kill from behind, and crow at the dawn.

What we need is a crusader. Not a preaching, scripture-quoting, holier-than-thou sort of fellow. Not an altruist, nor a gavel-thumper. But a Man, and we capitalize that symbolically. A man somewhere in the rusty machinery of this municipality, who cares not a whoop for authority and is willing to stack the possibility of losing his job against the possibility of sweeping out the unclean corridors of intrigue and corruption, and satisfying the ego of his own morals and ethics.

A two-fisted, slam-bang, tougher-than-thou sort of man! The streets of Richmond City are more sordid than its sewers. They smell to high heaven. We need a chunk of brimstone to sterilize them. Amen.

"Whew!" whistled MacBride. "This will cause apoplexy in the Town Hall. The *Free Press* is out to ride 'em."

He was back in his office at the precinct at one, and Kennedy was sound asleep in the swivel chair. He kicked it, and Kennedy awoke.

"Hello, Mac."

"Hello. Pretty ripe, that editorial."

"Thanks."

MacBride looked at him. "You didn't write it."

"Yup. My name'll go down in posterity."

"If the Big Gang knew you did it, it would go down in the Deceased Column. Get out o' that chair."

Kennedy got out and sat on the desk, swinging his legs.

MacBride said, "I see, now, that you were shooting in my direction. Humph. Crusader!"

Kennedy smiled. "Would you, Mac."

"I am," snapped MacBride, "but there's nothing of the crusader about me. I'm sore, and I'll bust up this racket if it's the last thing I do. That poor kid, Kennedy—her name's Betty… God Almighty! Government of the people, by the people and for the people! What a bromide!"

He pulled an empty cigar box from his desk, took a pen and a piece of paper, and on the paper printed, in large letters:

SPARE CHANGE, BOYS, FOR A HARD-HIT NEIGHBOR

This he pasted on the cover of the box, and said, "Dig down, Kennedy."

He himself dropped in a couple of dollars, and Kennedy added another and some odd change. Then MacBride carried the box into the central room and placed it on the desk, where none might pass without seeing it.

Still in plain-clothes, he shook Kennedy, and walked down to River Street. He found the Colonial depot, and from a number of drivers learned that, on cold nights, they usually stopped at the *Owl's Nest*, out beyond Bingham Center, on the pike, for a shot of rum. Reasoning that Saunders had lived, driven and drunk similarly, he took a trolley car to the outskirts of the city, alighted where Main

crossed Farmingville Turnpike, and boarded an outbound bus.

It was a long ride, and they passed the shattered truck on the way. It still lay in the gully, but a derrick was at work, and one of the Colonial's trucks was gathering up the remains. At four-thirty he left the bus, and stood regarding the *Owl's Nest*. It stood well back off the highway, a low, rambling casino with many windows. The main entrance was decorated with colored light bulbs, but on one side was a sign, *Delivery Entrance*, and MacBride judged that this also was the logical entrance for truck-men in quest of a drink.

He pushed this door open and found himself in a hallway that turned sharply to the left. But directly in front of him was an open door leading into a small, shabby room containing two tables and a half dozen chairs, and a fly-specked electric light hanging from the ceiling.

MacBride sat down, and presently a man in shirt-sleeves entered.

"Rye highball," said MacBride.

The man, large, beetle-browed, hairy-armed, looked him over, then shook his head. "No drinks here, buddy."

"Tripe! I know."

"Not here, buddy."

"You the boss?"

"No."

"Flag the boss."

The man disappeared, and a few minutes later a short, fat, prosperous-looking man entered with a frown of annoyance. But the frown disappeared like a cloud and sunlight beamed.

"Oh, hello, Mac."

"Didn't know you ran this dump, Hen. Sit down."

Hen sat down, cheerful, twinkle-eyed, and said to the hovering waiter, "Make it two, Mike." And a moment later, to MacBride, "What *you* doing out this way, Mac?"

"Poking around."

"I mean—really, Mac."

"Trailing a clue. Hear about that truck smash-up?"

"Sure. Tough, wasn't it?"

"You don't know the half of it. And that's why I'm up here, Hen."

Hen's eyes widened perplexedly. He started to say something, but the drinks arrived, and he licked his lips instead. The waiter went out, and the two men regarded each other.

MacBride jerked his head toward the door. "How long has that guy been working here? What's his name?"

"A month. Mike Bannon."

"He serves all the drinks?"

"Ye-es."

"All the truck drivers stop in this room, I guess?"

"Sure."

MacBride took a drink and let it sink in. "Good stuff," he nodded, and then leaned

across the table. “You’re a white guy, Hen, and you’re sensible. Fire that man.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Fire him tomorrow. If he gets sore, tell him the cops are tightening down on you, and you’re cutting out the hooch for a month or more. I’m doing you a turn, Hen. You want to keep your hands clean, don’t you?”

“Cripes, yes, Mac!”

“Then bounce him—tomorrow at noon.”

“Okey, Mac.”

MacBride was back in the precinct at seven.

He picked up Rigallo and Doran and they all went over the Headquarters and sought out the Bureau of Criminal Identification. This was a vast place, lined with rows of card-indexes, and on the wall were several huge metal books, attached by their backs, so that a man could swing the metal pages back and forth and scan the photographs of those men who, having stepped outside the law, were recorded therein, with further details of their crimes recorded in the surrounding files. MacBride, turning page after page, suddenly grunted and pointed.

“There’s the guy, boys,” he said.

He noted the number, gave it to the attendant, and while waiting, said to his prizes, “Working at the *Owl’s Nest*.”

The attendant reappeared with a card and handed it to MacBride. MacBride scrutinized it. “H’m. Michael Shane, arrested for criminal assault against Rosie Horovitz, June 12, 1924. Indicted, June 13th. Acquitted July 2nd. Lack of evidence. And again: Arrested October 5, 1925. Charge, felonious assault with attempt to rob. Charge preferred by Sven Runstrom. Indicted October 6th. Sentenced October 15th, sixty days, hard labor.”

“Let’s go out and nab him,” said Rigallo.

“No,” said MacBride. “He’s working as Mike Bannon. Come on.”

They returned to the precinct, and in the privacy of his office, MacBride said, “This guy poisoned Saunders’ liquor, but I’m after bigger game. He’s a tough nut, and he’ll hold his tongue until some shyster, retained by the gang, gets him out of our hands on a writ. What we want to know is, who’s the boss of the gang, the mayor’s right-hand man. *That* is the guy we want. We’ve got more to do than apprehend the actual murderer of Saunders. We’ve got to grab the mob and their boss, and prevent further killings, and when we do this we’ll have the mayor against the wall. Shane is a stoical bum, and a rubber hose wouldn’t work him. We’ve got to get the big guy-the one with the most brains and the least guts.”

“What’s your idea?” asked Rigallo.

“Just this. At tomorrow noon Shane gets his walking papers from Hen Meloy. You go out there tomorrow morning in a hired flivver, and when this guy gets a bus headed for town, tail him. He’ll head for his boss, to report. Tail him that far and then give me a ring.”

MacBride went home early that night, slept well, and was back on the job at nine next morning. He took the cigar box from the desk in the central room, went into his office, and counted out forty-two dollars and fifty cents. This he shoved into an envelope, with the brief message, “From the bunch at the Second Police Precinct.” He called in a reserve, gave him the envelope and the Haggerty Alley address, and then, sitting back with a sigh, started his first cigar of the day.

Kennedy dropped in on his way to Headquarters, and said, "The municipal inspectors condemned two more Colonial trucks. Said Saunders death was caused by a faulty steering gear. Nobody knows the details? What did the morgue say, Mac?"

"Run along, Kennedy."

"Keeping it under your hat, eh? It's all right, Mac. I can wait. Here's another tip. The Colonial people aren't dumb, and there's a guard riding on all their night trucks now. They're die-hards, Mac. These guys liked Saunders, and they're primed to start shooting first chance they get."

Kennedy went out, and MacBride cursed him in one breath and complimented him in the next.

At two o'clock the telephone rang and MacBride grabbed it.

"Cap? Rigallo."

"Shoot, Riggy."

"Tailed him okey. Two-ten Jockey Street. I'm waiting in the cigar store on the corner. Come heeled."

MacBride hung up, slapped on his visored cap, and strode into the central room. "Six reserves, Sergeant! Ready, Doran!"

A windy look was in his eyes, and his jaw squared.

4

OCKEY Street is hell's own playground. You enter it from the theatrical center, and all is glittering, blatant and intensely alive. But as you bore deeper, riverward, the street lights become further apart, the chop suey joints disappear, and the houses, losing height, likewise lose color.

It was cold that afternoon, and fog smoked in from the river, damp and chill. The din of upper Jockey Street died to a murmur, and on its lower reaches few men were afield. Here or there you heard footsteps, and soon, dimly at first, then clearer, a pedestrian materialized out of the fog, swished by and gradually disappeared again, trailing his footsteps. Up the man-made causeway came the muffled rhythmic tolling of a pierhead fog bell.

Down it rolled a black, inconspicuous touring car, with drawn side-curtains. Nearing a side street, the door to the tonneau opened, and MacBride leaped out. The car rolled on, was swallowed up by the wet gray clouds.

MacBride strode toward a cigar-store. Rigallo came out, smoking a cigarette, looking unconcerned. They fell in step and strolled down the side street, leisurely.

"He hasn't come out, Riggy?"

"No. Came on the bus to Main and Farmingville. Took a taxi from there. Got off at Main and Jockey. Walked. I left the car there and walked, too. Saw him go in 210. There's a gray touring car parked outside-powerful boat."

"I'll crash the joint."

"They'll never open the door. Bet you need signals."

"Try my way."

They circumnavigated the block, and came out upon Jockey Street a block nearer the river. Here the police car was parked, the men

still hidden inside. MacBride stood on the edge of the curb, spoke to the curtains.

"I'm aiming to get in 210. Two minutes after I leave here you boys get out and surround this block. It may be messy."

"Okey," came Doran's low voice.

MacBride said, "Come on, Rigallo," and they walked up the street. He explained. "We'll both climb the steps to the door. I'll knock. Somebody will come, but if he doesn't get the proper signals, he won't open. But he'll listen. Then you walk down the steps, hard as you can, and walk away. He may open then and peek out. I'll crash it."

"What then?"

"Hell knows!" MacBride's fists clenched. "Just let me get in that dump!"

They reached the four stone steps that led to the door of 210. They mounted them, and MacBride, one hand on the gun in his pocket, knocked with the other.

They waited, looking at each other. Presently they heard the padding of footsteps, then silence. MacBride knocked again, insistently. No, that wasn't the signal. He nodded to Rigallo. Rigallo nodded back, stamped heavily down the steps and walked off.

MacBride flattened against the doorframe, breath bated, gun half-drawn. The latch clicked. A hinge creaked. The door moved an inch, another inch. A nose appeared. Then two beady eyes, and a pasty, pinched face.

MacBride cannoned against the door, and knocked the look-out sprawling. The door, working on a spring, slammed shut. The captain was bent over the prostrate, speechless form, with the muzzle of his gun screwed into a sunken chest.

"Chirp and I'll bust you!"

The man writhed under the firm pressure of the gun. His mouth worked, gasping. His eyes popped.

"Cripes!" he moaned.

"Pipe down! Quick, now. What's the lay? Where's the gang?"

"Cripes!"

"Spill it!

"Cripes!"

Desperate, MacBride rapped his jaw with the gun barrel.

"Ouch!"

"Then talk!"

"Second floor, door't' back o' the hall. Cripes!"

"Open?"

"Ub-yup."

"How many?"

"Tuh-ten."

"Get up!"

MacBride hauled the runt to his feet, dragged him to the front door, opened it. Rigallo was on the curb. MacBride motioned to him, and Rigallo skipped up.

"Take this, Riggy!"

Rigallo grabbed the look-out, clapped on manacles. "Should I get the boys?"

"No. I'll start the ball. There are ten guys upstairs, and I feel ambitious. Besides, if we all crash it, it will be a mix-up and the boys might get hurt. One man can crash a room better than six. I'll blow when I need you. You hang here, and then blow for the boys."

"It's a long chance, Cap!"

"I carry heavy insurance. Don't let this door close."

MacBride turned and re-entered the hall. Gun drawn, he went up the stairway, paused at the first landing, listened, and then ascended the next flight. He was wary, alert, dangerous. There were captains on the Force who directed operations from the outside, smoking cigars on street corners, at a safe distance. MacBride was a man who never sent his men into a trap before first examining the trap himself. One reason why his wife lay awake nights, thinking.

Door in the rear. He stood at the stair-head, muscles tense, gun pointing toward the door. He advanced straight, light-footed, primed to go off. He stood before the door, the muzzle of his gun an inch from the panel.

His left hand started out, closed gently, carefully, over the knob. Some said you should turn a knob slow, bit by bit, until you could not turn it any more; then heave and rush. But sometimes you never got that far. A knob might creak. A wandering gaze on the other side might see it turning.

Turn, heave and rush all at once—that was it. MacBride did it. The door whanged open and he crouched on the threshold, poised and deadly.

A woman, alone, looked up from the depths of an overstuffed chair. She had been trimming her fingernails with a steel file, and she sat there, apparently unperturbed, the file, in her right hand, poised over the thumb of her left. She wore a negligee, pink and sheer. Her hair was peroxide treated, bobbed and fuzzy.

MacBride reached back and closed the door. The woman, with a shrug, went on trimming her nails, and said, in an offhand manner,

"Got your nerve, Cap, busting in on a lady."

"What's wrong with that sentence, Gertie?"

"Well, rub it in."

"Get dressed."

"I'm not going out."

"No?" He leaned back. "I'm waiting."

She rose, running her hands down her sides and lodging them on her hips, thumbs forward.

"Suppose I yell?"

"You'll be the first woman I ever killed."

"You would?"

"I sure would."

They stood staring at each other, the lynx and the lion.

"Think I can get dressed with you in the room?"

"I'm not particular. If you're too modest, put on that fur coat."

"I'm not modest. *Particular*, guy."

"Put on the coat."

She tilted her chin, cut MacBride with a brassy, withering look. Then she sauntered over to the coat, picked it up and slipped into it. She thrust her hand into a pocket.

"Careful!" warned MacBride.

She laughed, drew out a handkerchief, touched her nose and then shoved the handkerchief back into her pocket. A split second later flame and smoke burst through the fur, and hot lead ran up MacBride's gun arm. His gun clattered to the floor.

The woman leaped for the switch, threw off the lights. With his left hand MacBride, gritting his teeth with pain, recovered the gun. Another burst of flame slashed through the darkness, and a shot whanged by his ear. He dived, headlong, collided with the woman and knocked her over. Again her gun went off, wildly, and the shot banged through the ceiling.

With his wounded hand MacBride groped for hers—found it, wrenched away her gun, groaned with the pain of it. He heaved up, rushed to the door, shot home the bolt. Then he dived for the light switch, snapped it, and a dazzling radiance flooded the room.

The woman, on her feet, flung a Chinese vase. MacBride ducked and the vase crashed through a mirror. She crouched, quivering in every muscle, her breath pumping fiercely from her lungs, eyes wide and storming with anger.

"You—lousy—bum!" she cried.

"Pipe down!"

Fists hammered on the door, feet kicked it. Voices snarled.

The woman laughed hysterically. "The Gang! The Gang! They'll riddle you! They'll cut your dirty heart out!"

"Will they?"

MacBride drew his whistle, blew it.

5

BRUPTLY, the scuffling and pounding stopped. A moment of silence, then retreating footsteps.

MacBride stood with his cap tilted over one ear and a slab of hair down over one eyebrow. His right arm hung down, blood weaving a red tracery on his hand, then dropping to the floor. His hand felt heavy as lead, dragging at wounded muscles. A thought struck him, and he shoved the hand into his coat pocket.

Footfalls sounded again, hammering up the stairs. Cops' shoes—heavy-soled, thick-heeled. Now they were out in the hall, moving about, whispering hoarsely. MacBride backed against the door, unbolted it, pulled it open.

Rigallo came in. "Hell, Gertie!" he chuckled, sarcastically.

Gertie thumbed her nose and wiggled her fingers.

"You trollop!" snapped Rigallo.

"Pst, Riggy," said MacBride. "Where's the look-out?"

"Doran's got him in the machine."

"Jake!" He looked into the hall. Six cops out there and two closed doors. They had the doors covered. "Take her downstairs, Riggy."

"Who's her boy friend?"

"That's what we'll find out. She's not talkative just now. Grab a dress, sister, and take it along."

"If you think I'll spill the boy friend's name, MacBride, you're all wet," she snapped.

"Take her, Riggy."

Rigallo grabbed a dress from a hanger and flung it at her. It draped across her shoulder. She left it there.

"Get out," he jerked.

She put one hand on her hip and sauntered leisurely. Rigallo took a quick step, gripped her by the arm and propelled her out not too gently. She cursed and added something relative to his maternity. He trotted her down the stairs.

MacBride joined his cops. "Let's bust this door."

Seven guns boomed, and seven shots shattered the doorknob and crashed through the lock. Patrolman Grosskopf, one-time leader of a German mudgutter band, hurled his two hundred and twenty pounds of beef against the door and almost ripped it from its hinges.

MacBride waved his men back and stepped in. The room was empty. His right hand was still in his pocket. His men did not know he was wounded. He came out in the hall and nodded at the other door.

Bang! Seven shots sounded as one.

"Now, Grosskopf."

Grosskopf catapulted, and the door capitulated.

The room yawned empty. It showed signs of some having made a hasty departure. Bureau drawers were pulled out, a chair was overturned. Glasses, some of them still containing liquor, stood on the table. A chair, also, stood on the table.

"Up there," said MacBride, pointing to a skylight. "To table, to chair, to roof."

He led the way up to the roof, and they prowled around, from one roof to another. Wind, fog, and emptiness. They came to a fire-escape in the rear.

"They skipped," he said. "Come on back."

Below, in the hall, they found Rigallo and the woman, Doran and the look-out. MacBride looked at the woman but addressed his men. "We've got an ace-in-the-hole now. Let's go."

They went out into the foggy street, and MacBride said to the look-out, "Thought you tricked me, eh? Ten men in the back room!"

The woman laughed. "Ten! That's headquarters, Cap, not the barracks. What a joke! There was only three—in the front."

Rigallo said to the look-out, "Boy Scout, we will entertain you a while at the precinct. I have a nice new piece of rubber hose."

They piled into the police car. Its motor roared. It turned about and purred up Jockey Street, and at Main Rigallo got out and picked up his flivver, and the two cars proceeded toward the Second.

The prisoners were locked up in separate cells. Then MacBride, alone, went out

and walked several blocks and entered a door above which was a small sign bearing the legend, Dr. O. F. Blumm, M.D.

"Oh, hello, Mac."

"Hello, Doc. Fix this." He drew his blood-soaked hand from his pocket, and the doctor frowned, murmured, "H'm," and added, "Take off the coat, shirt."

The bullet had struck just above the wrist, sliced open three inches of the forearm and lodged in the hard flesh just short of the elbow. MacBride, teeth clamped, his eyes closed, shed streams of sweat while the doctor probed for the bullet and finally removed it. Then MacBride sank back, a little pale, very grim.

"It might have been worse," remarked the doctor.

"Sure," said MacBride, and breathed quietly while the wound was cauterized, stitched and bandaged.

"Most men take a little dope for this, Mac."

"Uh!" grunted MacBride through tight lips.

Through the fog, he returned to the station-house, his hand concealed in his pocket, his wound throbbing.

Kennedy was lounging in the office. "You look yellow around the gills, Mac."

"Liver," clipped MacBride, and took a drink.

"Hear you got Gertie Case and Midge Sutter."

"Urn."

"How long do you suppose you can hold 'em?"

"Watch me."

"There'll be a writ of release here before you know it," said Kennedy. "How come you didn't get the gang?"

"Breeze, Kennedy! Dammit, I'm not in the mood!"

Kennedy shrugged and went out.

Alone, MacBride drew out his hand, laid it on the desk. God, how the arm throbbed! He heard a voice outside the door and slipped the hand back into his pocket. The door opened and a big, bloated man, with a moon-face, large fishy eyes, and an air of pompous importance, sailed in.

"Hello, Mac."

"Hello."

Captain Bower, plainclothes, a Headquarters "yes man," and the mayor's bodyguard. MacBride drew into himself, wary, on guard.

Bower deposited his indecent bulk in an armchair and sent a tobacco shot into the cuspidor. "This latest business, Mac. The Jockey Street fizzle."

"Fizzle?"

"Well, whatever you like. Anyhow it's out of your district, and Headquarters is going to handle it. Another thing. We're also handling the case of Saunders. Of course, there's nothing to it, and we'll dispose of it right off."

MacBride's jaw hardened. Graft again! Nothing to it! Bah! They knew he was out to

riddle their racket. They were cornered, and playing a subtle game. They could not fire him immediately, could not shove him out in the sticks while this thing was hanging fire. But they *could* take a case out of his hands. Could they?

"It's my case, Bower," he snapped. "My men got the clues, did the tailing, and we've got Midge Sutter and that Case broad salted."

"On what charge?"

"Suspicion. That's enough for any cop."

"We'll work it out at Headquarters," said Bower, very matter-of-fact. "I'll take the pair along with me, now."

Color crept into MacBride's face. "Not before I indict 'em—tomorrow."

Bower frowned. "Don't be a goof. What can you indict 'em on?"

MacBride was in his last ditch, his back to the wall. He had hoped to conceal this, but—

He drew out his wounded arm, placed it on the table. "This, Bower. The woman potted me."

Bower's face dropped, and his mouth hung open. He stared at the bandaged hand. Then he drew his face back into place and got up.

"Good-bye," he sniffed, and pounded out.

MacBride waited a few minutes, then called in Rigallo. "Riggy, take Sutter in the sweat room. Sweat him."

"Right," nodded Rigallo, and went out.

MacBride sat back in his chair and lit a cigar. The pain pounded furiously, shot up and down his arm, reached his neck. Sweat stood out on his forehead, and muscles knotted on either side of his wide, firm mouth. An hour dragged by.

Then Rigallo came in, brushing his hands together. His hair, ordinarily neatly combed, was a bit disheveled.

"Well?" asked MacBride.

Rigallo shook his head. "No go. The guy is little but tough. He's been through it before. Knows if he squeals the gang will crucify him."

MacBride held up his wounded arm. Rigallo clicked his teeth.

"Hell, Mac. I didn't know."

"The broad got me. Look here, Riggy. You're the whitest wop I've ever known. My back is to the wall, and I need a guy who's willing to kick authority in the slats and play this game to a fare-three-well."

"Shoot, Mac."

"Take the broad and bounce her around from one station to another. They'll have a writ out for her, or some trick. The idea is, the writ mustn't find her. When they come here, I'll say she's over at the Third. Then I'll ring you and you take her to the Fourth and so on, and the guys at the Fourth will tell the runner you've taken her to the Fifth. Keep ahead of the runner. The precincts will play with us. They're good guys. Keep moving until tomorrow morning. Judge Ross will be on the job then, and he's the only judge we can depend on. He'll indict her. We'll get hell, Riggy, but we'll crash this racket."

"Right!"

Five minutes later Rigallo was headed for the Third with Gertie Case.

Ten minutes later a runner appeared with writs for Gertrude Case and Midge Sutter.

"Sutter's here," said MacBride, "and you can take him. But the Case woman's over at the Third."

And he telephoned the Third.

A little later a doctor from the Medical Examiner's Office, accompanied by Captain Bower, entered, and the doctor said:

"I'll look at your wound, Captain."

Grim, stony-faced, MacBride allowed his wound to be looked at.

The doctor said, "Bad, Captain. You can't carry on."

"The hell I can't!"

"Nevertheless—" The doctor sat down and affixed his signature to a document, scaled it across to MacBride. "You're released from active duty until I sign a health certificate of reinstatement. Signed by the Commissioner and attested by me. Go home and rest."

MacBride saw through a red haze. Vaguely, he heard Bower's words. "Your lieutenant will take charge until a captain can be sent over."

MacBride's heart sledge-hammered his ribs. The men went out, and he sat alone, like a man in a daze. Alone against graft, corruption and the very Department to which he had given eighteen years of his life! The blow should have crushed him, sent him storming out of the station in rage and righteous indignation. It should have driven him to ripping off his uniform, throwing his badge through the window, and cursing the Department to the nethermost depths.

But tough was MacBride, and a die-hard. He heaved up, swiveled and glared at the closed door. His lip curled, and challenge shone in his eyes.

"Home-*hell*!" he snarled.

6

UT he went out, his slouch hat yanked over his eyes. Night had closed in, half-brother to the fog. And both shrouded the city. Street lights glowed wanly, diffusing needle-like shafts of shimmering radiance. Headlights glared like hungry eyes. Autos hissed sibilantly on wet pavements. Faces appeared, palely afloat, and then disappeared.

Cold and wet and miserable, and MacBride tramping the streets, collar up, hands in pockets, pain pumping through his arm. In minutes he aged years. Why not let things slide? Why go to all the bother? What reward, what price honour? Let Headquarters take 'em. Let Bower frame their getaway. Cripes, but Bower would get a nice slice of graft out of this! How could a single precinct captain hope to carry his white plume in this city of graft?

He dragged to a stop at an intersection. Well, Rigallo was standing by him. And the State's Attorney was a square-shooter.

"H'm."

He suddenly flagged a taxi, climbed in and gave an address. Out of the dark of the street another figure appeared, got into a second taxi.

Ten minutes later MacBride alighted in a quiet, residential street, told the driver to wait, and ascending a flight of brown-stone steps,

pushed a bell-button. A servant appeared and MacBride gave his name. A moment later he was ushered from the foyer into a spacious library.

State's Attorney Rolland, thirty-eight, lean, blond, clean-cut in evening clothes, extended a hand. MacBride shook with his left, and though Rolland's eyes flickered, he said nothing.

"You look worn, Captain. Sit down. Cigar?"

"Thanks—no. Am I keeping you?"

"No. Dinner at eight." He leaned against the side of a broad mahogany table, arms folded loosely, eyes quizzical.

MacBride detailed, briefly, the fight in Jockey Street, the apprehension of Gertie Case and Midge Sutter; the release of Sutter on a writ, the game of hide and seek even now being played by Rigallo.

"I'll pick up Rigallo and the woman around dawn," he went on. "I'll get her indicted. I thought if you could be around there, to take her in hand before her lawyer gets to her—Hell, we've got to get the jump on these pups!"

"Don't know her man, eh?"

"No. That's why we've got to hold her. If she's faced with twenty years for shooting an officer, she'll think. She's thirty now, and no guy is worth enough in her eyes to take a twenty-year rap for him. She'll come across. Ten to one her boy friend realizes this."

"And you believe that Saunders chap was poisoned?"

"Yes. Bannon did it. He's been lying low for a couple years. Always lone-wolfed. That's why we can't connect him with the gang he must have hooked with. If the Case woman squeals, we'll get the gang, and getting the gang means-"

"Ah, yes," nodded Rolland.

It was politic, in the State's Attorney's rooms, not to mention the name both men had in mind.

Then Rolland said, "Good you have the woman. These gangsters laugh at a prison sentence. But a woman—and especially one of her type—looks upon prison as death. I'll be there in the morning. Take care of your wound."

They shook, and MacBride departed. The Regime thought they had picked soft clay in Rolland. What a shock when they had discovered cement instead, unpliable!

Entering the taxi, MacBride drove off, and further back, another taxi began moving.

He left his taxi at the Fourth, and discovered that Rigallo and the woman had gone on to the Fifth ten minutes before. He hung around, saw the runner with the writ rush in and start broadcasting to the desk. The sergeant told him where the woman had gone, and cursing, the runner went off and out like a streak.

MacBride followed from station to station, and at the Seventh, just after the runner had gone on, he met Bower.

"Look here, MacBride. What's your game?"

"What's yours, Bower?"

"Cut that boloney."

"Then cut yours."

Bower scowled. “You’ll get broke for this. Stop that guy that’s got the dame.”

“I don’t know where he is. What’s more, Bower, I’m off duty. Got nothing to say. You find him—and try stopping him. Your job depends on that, Bower.”

Bower worked his hands. He started to say something but bit his lip instead and stormed out.

A game was being played on the checkerboard of Richmond City’s police stations. Rigallo moved from one to another, doubled back, moved across town, uptown, downtown. Midnight passed, and dawn approached, and still Rigallo kept the lead; and Bower blundered in his wake, fuming and cursing; and the man with the writ, worn to a frazzle by the chase, now tottered at Bower’s heels.

MacBride, weary, haggard, sapped by the pain in his arm, sometimes dizzy, met Rigallo in the Eighth at four a.m. Gertie cursed and protested at such inhuman treatment, but no one paid her any attention.

MacBride and Rigallo formulated plans, and then MacBride took the woman and carried on the game. When Bower caught up with Rigallo, the latter wasted half an hour of the other’s time by stalling, kidding and then finally telling Bower that the woman was probably uptown. Bower saw the trick and bowled off in high heat.

When he caught up with MacBride, he discovered that the woman had again changed hands and was now probably downtown. Bower cursed a sizzling blue streak and was indiscreet enough to call MacBride an untoward name.

With his one good hand, MacBride hung a left hook on Bower’s jaw and draped him over a table. Then he went out into the wet gray dawn, and felt a little better.

At half-past eight he met Rigallo in the Third, joined him and the woman in Rigallo’s flivver.

“Cripes, I’ll never get over this!” rasped Gertie.

“You said something, sister,” nodded MacBride.

“You’re a big bum, MacBride,” she stabbed. “And you’re another, Rigallo.”

Rigallo spat. “Three of a kind, eh?”

“And your mother’s another,” she added.

Rigallo took one hand from the wheel and with the palm of it slapped her face.

She laughed, baring her teeth, brazenly.

A block behind, a taxi was following.

Ahead yawned the entrance to Law Street, and half way down it loomed the Court.

“Here’s where you get indicted, sister,” said MacBride.

“I’m laughing.”

“You don’t look that way.”

On one side of the entrance to Law Street was a cigar store. On the other corner was a drugstore. As the flivver crossed the square, a man sauntered from the drug-store, and at the same time another sauntered from the cigar-store.

They looked across at each other, and both nodded and shoved hands into pockets. *Bang*!—*bang! Bang—bang*!

7

RIGALLO stiffened at the wheel. Gertie screamed, clutched her breast. MacBride ducked, and the flivver leaped across the square, slewed over the curb and crashed into the drug-store window.

Pedestrians stopped, horrified, frozen in their tracks. The two well-dressed men who had stood on either corner joined and walked briskly up the street toward a big, gray touring car.

The taxi that had been trailing the flivver stopped, and Kennedy, leaping out, ran across to the demolished flivver. He reached it as MacBride, streaked with blood, burst from the wreckage.

"There's the car, Mac!" He pointed.

"Where's another?" clipped MacBride.

Kennedy nodded to the taxi, and they ran over.

"Nossir," barked the driver, "I ain't chasin' them guys." He climbed out. "You guys go ahead."

"I'll drive," said Kennedy casually.

"Kennedy," said MacBride, "you stay out of this."

"What! After tailing you all night! Coming?"

He was beside the wheel, shoving into gear. MacBride clipped an oath and hopped in, and the taxi went howling up the street.

He muttered, "Pups-got-Riggy! Step on it, Kennedy!"

"The broad?"

"Dead."

"They made sure you wouldn't indict her."

"Pups! *Watch that turn!*"

"Yu-up!"

Kennedy took the turn on two wheels, knocked over a push-cart full of fruit, and jammed his foot hard down on the gas.

"Applesauce!"

"And crushed pineapple!"

Bang!

A cowl-light disappeared from the taxi.

Bang-bang-bang! went MacBride's gun.

People scattered into doorways. Moving cars stopped. Heads appeared at windows.

The gray car swung into a wide street set with trolley tracks. It weaved recklessly through traffic, heading for Farmingville Turnpike, where speed would count. It roared past red traffic lights, honking its horn, grazing other cars, swerving and swaying in its mad, reckless flight.

The taxi hurtled after it no less recklessly. MacBride was leaning well out of the seat, twisting his left arm to shoot past the windshield. Kennedy swung the machine

through startled traffic with a chilling nonchalance.

MacBride fired, smashed the rear window in the tonneau.

"Lower, Mac. Get a tire," suggested Kennedy.

"Can't aim well around this windshield."

"Bust the windshield."

MacBride broke it with his gun barrel. He dared not fire again, however. People were in the way, darting across the street in panicky haste. A traffic cop was ahead, having almost been knocked over by the gray touring car. MacBride recognized him—O'Day. He leaned out, and as they whanged by, yelled:

"O'Day—riot squad!"

The gray car reached Farmingville Turnpike, a wide, macadam speedway, and its exhaust, hammered powerfully. The taxi was doing sixty miles an hour and Kennedy had the throttle right down against the floor boards.

"Faster!" barked MacBride.

"Can't, Mac. This ain't no Stutz!"

Bang! No shot that time. The rear left had blown, and the taxi skidded, bounced, and dived along like a horse with the blind staggers. Kennedy jammed on his brakes as a big powerful car slewed around him and slid to a stop ten yards ahead. It was a roadster, and out of it jumped Bower.

"Well, MacBride, see what you've done!"

"Pipe down, Bower!" clipped MacBride, starting for the roadster. "Come on, Kennedy. This boat looks powerful."

Bower got in his way. "MacBride, for cripes' sake, lay off! You'll get broke, man!" His voice cracked, and he was desperate.

"Out of my way!" snapped MacBride.

Bower tried to grasp him. MacBride uncorked his left and sent Bower sprawling in the bushes. Then he ran toward the roadster and Kennedy hopped in behind the wheel.

"Step on it, Kennedy!"

Kennedy stepped on, and whistled. "Boy, this is *my* idea of a boat!"

Inside of three minutes he was doing seventy miles an hour. MacBride's hand dropped to the seat, touched a metal object. He picked it up. It was a pistol fitted with a silencer. Kennedy saw it out of the corner of his eye.

MacBride opened the gun. A shell had been fired.

"Now," said Kennedy, "you know how we got a flat."

MacBride swore under his breath.

Soon they saw the gray touring car, and Kennedy hit the gun for seventy-five miles an hour. They were out in the sticks now. Fields, gullies, occasional groves of sparse timber flashed by. Curves were few and far between. The road, for the most part, ran in long, smooth stretches.

The roadster gained. MacBride screwed open the windshield, fired, aiming low. He fired again. The touring car suddenly swerved, its rear end bounced. Then it left the road, hurtled down an embankment, whirled over and over, its metal ripping and screeching over stones and stumps.

Kennedy applied his brakes, but the roadster did not stop until it was a hundred yards beyond the still tumbling touring car. MacBride reloaded his gun, shoved the one with the silencer into his pocket, and started back. Kennedy was beside him. As they left the road and ran through the bushes, they saw two figures staggering into the timber beyond.

MacBride shouted and fired his gun, but the figures disappeared in the woods. Kennedy brought up beside the shattered touring car. Four broken, twisted men were linked with the mangled wreckage.

"They're done for, Mac," he said.

"You stay here, Kennedy. I'm going after the others."

"So am I."

"Kennedy—"

"Let's go, Mac." He was off on the run.

MacBride galloped past him, dived into the timber. Somewhere ahead, two men were thrashing fiercely through the thickets. Five minutes later MacBride caught the fleeting glimpse of one. He yelled for the man to stop. The man turned and pumped three shots. Two clattered through the branches. A third banged into a tree behind which MacBride had ducked—

Kennedy, coming up at a trot, raised his automatic and blazed away. MacBride saw the man stop, throw up his arms, and buckle.

"Come on," said Kennedy.

They plunged ahead, reached the fallen man.

"Bannon!" muttered MacBride. "You finished him, Kennedy."

"Good."

Bang!

Kennedy and MacBride flung themselves into a convenient clump of bushes. They lay still, back to back, until they heard the sounds of continued flight up ahead.

"Let's," said MacBride, heaving up.

"Sure—let's."

MacBride started, hunched way over, darting from tree to tree, bush to bush. He stopped, to listen. Kennedy puffed up behind him.

"Come on," said MacBride.

"Sorry, Mac…"

MacBride pivoted. Kennedy was sitting on the ground, holding his right leg.

"Hell, Kennedy!"

"Hell, Mac!"

MacBride bent down.

"Go on," grunted Kennedy. "Get the slob!"

"I'll get him," said MacBride, and started off.

Dodging from tree to tree, he finally came to the edge of the timber. Before him lay a wide, marshy field, and the wind rustled in blanched weeds and bushes.

Bang!

MacBride's hat was shifted an inch, and the bullet struck a tree behind his head. His

teeth clicked and he fired three shots into the weeds, then ducked. He crouched, breath bated, and listened.

The weeds crackled, and he heard a groan. Warily he crawled out into the weeds, worming his way over frozen puddles. A groan, and a rasped oath reached his ears. Sounded a bit to the right. He wriggled in that direction. He stopped, waiting. Five, ten minutes passed. Half an hour.

Then, ten yards from him a head appeared above the weeds, then a pair of shoulders. MacBride stood up.

"Drop it, guy!" He leaped as he said it.

With a snarl the man spun, but not completely. MacBride jabbed his gun in the man's side, and the latter regarded him furiously over one shoulder.

"Hello, Sciarvi."

Black and blue welts were on Sciarvi's face. He was hatless, and his overcoat was ripped in several places.

"Where'd I pot you?" asked MacBride, snatching his gun.

"In the guts," grated Sciarvi.

"Didn't know you had any."

"Get me to a doctor. Snap on it, and can the wisecracks. You don't worry me, MacBride."

"Get going." MacBride prodded him. "And lay off the lip, you lousy Dago! You're the guy I've been looking for, Sciarvi, and I'll see you to the chair!"

"Yeah? Laugh that off, MacBride. I got friends."

"I'll get your friends, too."

"That's a joke!"

"On you, Wop."

They passed into the timber, and came upon Kennedy leaning against a tree and smoking a cigarette.

"Sciarvi, eh?" he drawled. "Spats Sciarvi, the kid himself, the Beau Brummell of crookdom, the greasy, damn dago."

"Yeah?" sneered Sciarvi. "When I get out of the doctor's care I'll come around and pay you a visit."

"Tell me another bed-time story, Sciarvi!"

They moved along, Kennedy limping in the rear. They came upon Bannon, alias Shane, lying face down, quite dead. They walked past, rustled through the bushes, and came out near the wrecked car.

Halfa dozen policemen and a sergeant looked up, and then Bower appeared, red-faced and bellicose.

"Oh," grumbled MacBride, "the riot squad. What did you do, come around to pick souvenirs?"

"We'll take the prisoner," rumbled Bower.

"You'll take hell!" said MacBride.

"Damn you, MacBride!" roared Bower.

MacBride pulled the gun with the silencer from his pocket, held it in his palm, looked at Bower. "Don't you think you'd better pipe down?"

Bower closed his mouth abruptly, stood swaying on his feet, his bloodshot face suffused with chagrin.

"Come on, Bower," snarled Sciarvi, "do your stuff."

Bower caught his breath, glared at Sciarvi with mixed hatred and fear. Then he stamped his foot and pointed a shaking finger at MacBride.

"You'll see—you'll see!" he threatened, but his tone was choked and unconvincing.

MacBride chuckled derisively, turned to the sergeant and said, "There's a stiff back in the woods. Better get him."

Then he pushed Sciarvi up the slope toward the road, and Kennedy limped after him. They reached the roadster and Kennedy eased in behind the wheel.

"Your leg," said MacBride.

"It's the right one, Mac. I'll use the handbrake."

Sciarvi was shoved in and MacBride followed, and the roadster hummed back toward Richmond City.

"Now the big guy," said Kennedy.

"Now the big guy," said MacBride.

"Jokes!" cackled Sciarvi.

8

HE MAYOR paced the library of his opulent, fifteen-room mansion. He wore a beaver-brown suit, a starched, striped collar, a maroon tie and diamond stick-pin. He was small, chunky, with a cleft chin, a bulbous nose, and shiny red lips. He wore *pince-nez*, attached to a black-ribbon, and this, combined with the gray at his temples, gave him a certain *distingue* air. He was known for a clubable fellow, and a charming after-dinner speaker; and he went in for boosting home trade, sponsoring beauty contests, and having his picture taken while presenting lolly-pops to the half-starved kids of the South Side, bivouack of the bohunks.

He was not his best this morning. There was a hunted look in his usually brilliant eyes, and corrugated lines on his forehead, and he'd lost count of how many times he'd paced the room. He stopped short, to listen. There was a commotion outside the door, a low, angry voice, and the high-pitched, protesting voice of Simmonds, his man.

Perplexed, he started toward the door, and was about to reach for the knob when the door burst open. He froze in his tracks, then elevated chest and chin and clasped his hands behind his back.

MacBride strode in, kicked shut the door with his heel. He was grimy, blood-streaked, and dangerous. A pallor shone beneath his ruddy tan, and dark circles were under his eyes. He was weary and worn and the hand of his wounded arm was resting in his pocket. His coat collar was half up, half down, and his battered fedora, with Sciarvi's bullet hole in the crown, was jammed down to his eyebrows.

"Well?" said the Mayor.

"Well!" said MacBride.

And they stood and regarded each other and said not a word for a whole minute.

"Who are you?" asked the Mayor.

"MacBride. A common precinct captain you never saw before. But you know the name, eh?"

"Humph," grunted the Mayor. "I shall refer you to my secretary. I'm not in the habit of receiving visitors except by appointment."

MacBride lashed him with windy blue eyes, and a crooked smile tugged at his lips. "Mister Mayor, Spats Sciarvi's dying. He wants to see you."

The Mayor blinked and a tremor ran over his short, chunky frame.

"Sciarvi? Who is Sciarvi?"

"Better come along and see."

"I don't know him."

He turned on his heel and strode away.

MacBride put his hand on the knob. "Remember, Mister Mayor, I carried a dying man's wish. He's at 109 Ship Street."

The Mayor stopped, stood still, but did not turn.

MacBride left the room, and as he went out through the front door he ran into Bower. They stopped and stared at each other.

Bower snarled, "Where's Sciarvi? What did you do with him? He ain't at Headquarters. He ain't in none o' the precincts. He ain't in the hospitals."

"Ask the mayor," said MacBride, and passed on.

He got into a taxi, sank wearily into the cushions, and closed his eyes. Twenty minutes later the taxi jerked to a stop. The driver reached back, opened the door and waited. After a moment he looked around.

"Hey," he called.

"Urn." MacBride awoke, paid his fare and entered a hallway.

The room he walked into was electrically lighted. Sciarvi lay on a bed, his face drained of color. Kennedy sat on a chair while a doctor was bandaging his leg. Another doctor hovered over Sciarvi.

"MacBride… ?" a question was in Sciarvi's tone.

MacBride shook his head. "Your friend wouldn't come. Never heard of you."

Sciarvi stared. "You're lyin', MacBride!"

"God's truth, Sciarvi!"

Their eyes held, and in the captain's gaze Sciarvi must have read the awful truth.

He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. Then he glared. "Damn your soul, MacBride, why are you hidin' me here? Why didn't you take me to a hospital?"

MacBride said, "You started yelling for a doctor. This was the first M.D. plate I saw."

"Why the hell didn't you turn me over to Bower?"

"You're in my hands, Sciarvi, not Bower's. I've got two doctors here. You wanted your friend, and I went for him. He said he didn't know you. You've gotten a damned sight more than you deserve already. Quit yapping."

"Cripes, what a break!" groaned Sciarvi, relaxing, closing his eyes.

MacBride sat down, stared at Kennedy's bandaged leg. Kennedy looked sapped and drawn. But his cynical smile drew a twisted line across his jaw.

"I needed a vacation, Mac," he drawled.

"Hurt?"

"Hell, yes!" And still he smiled, eyes lazy-lidded, features composed.

The one doctor left Kennedy, and joined the other doctor and the two doctors put their heads together and conversed in undertones. Then they looked at Sciarvi, examined his wound, took his temperature. After which they went back to the window, put their heads together again, and mumbled some more.

The upshot of this was quite natural. One doctor said, "Captain MacBride, we have come to the conclusion that, for the sake of everyone concerned, this man should be removed to the City Hospital."

"Gawd!" groaned Sciarvi.

"Huh?" said MacBride.

"Gawd!" groaned Sciarvi.

All eyes looked toward him. He glared at the doctors. "City Hospital, eh? Why the hell don't you come right out and say I'm done for? I know the City Hospital. You saw-bones always send a dyin' guy there. It's just a clearin' house for stiffs. Come on, mister, am I done for?"

The doctor who had spoken before spoke again. "I will tell you frankly—you have one chance in a hundred of living."

"What odds!" cackled Sciarvi, sinking again. Then a shocked look came into his eyes, and he stared with the fierce concentration of those who are outward bound.

"MacBride!" he choked.

Kennedy drew a pencil and a couple of blank envelopes from his pocket.

MacBride stood at the bedside. "Yes, Sciarvi?"

"The Mayor—the pup! He hired me, at a thousand a month to wage a war of—whaddeya call it?—intimidation?—against the Colonial Trucking. He promised absolute protection in case I got in a jam. For the killing of Saunders—Bannon did it—I got a bonus of fifteen hundred. The Mayor supplied that special kind o' poison. He got it from the City Chemist. When you got Gertie, I wised him and he started working to nip an indictment in the bud. His right-hand man is Bower. Bower flopped, and two this mornin' I told the Mayor that if Gertie was planted in the State's Attorney's hands, we were done for. He turned white. He was in a hole, and he asked me what idea I had. I told him we could block off Law Street and get rid of Gertie. He said go ahead. We went ahead. Huh—and now the pup says he don't know me! Ugh… Get a—ugh…"

"Get an ambulance," said one doctor.

"He wants a priest," said MacBride, understanding.

"He won't die for half an hour," said the doctor. "And if we get him to the hospital—"

"He'll burn in the chair eventually," said MacBride.

"That's not the point," said the doctor, and took up a telephone.

When he put it down, Kennedy said, "I wrote it down, Mac. I've signed as a witness. You sign and then the doctors."

All signed, and then MacBride stood over Sciarvi. “Want to sign this, Sciarvi?”

“Read it.”

MacBride read it. Sciarvi nodded, took the pen and scrawled his signature.

“Get a… ugh…”

Five minutes later an ambulance clanged to a stop outside. Two men came in with a stretcher, a hospital doctor looked Sciarvi over briefly, and then they carried him out, and the ambulance roared off.

Kennedy hobbled out on MacBride’s arm, and they entered a taxi. Twenty minutes later they drew up before an imposing mansion. Kennedy hobbled out and with MacBride’s assistance climbed the ornate steps.

MacBride rang the bell and a servant opened the door. MacBride brushed him aside and helped Kennedy into the foyer.

The mayor was standing in the open door of his library, and his face was ghastly white. Toward him MacBride walked and Kennedy hobbled, and the mayor backed slowly into the room. MacBride closed the door. Kennedy sat down in a comfortable chair and lit a cigarette. The mayor stood with his hands clasped behind his back—very white, very still, very breathless. MacBride looked around the room, and then walked toward a table. He pointed to the phone.

“May I use it?”

The mayor said nothing. MacBride picked up the instrument and gave a number. A moment later he asked, “That Sciarvi fellow. What about him?” He listened, said, “H’m. Thanks,” and hung up.

Then he drew an envelope from his pocket and handed it to the mayor. The mayor read, and moved his neck in his stiff collar, as though something were gagging him. His hand shook. Then he laughed, peculiarly, and scaled the letter on the desk.

“His dying confession,” said MacBride, picking up the envelope.

“Confessions made at such times are often worthless. This Sciarvi was a little off. A dead man makes a poor witness.”

MacBride nodded. “Yes. But, you see, Mister Mayor, he is not dead. He had one chance in a hundred, and he got it. They just told me he’ll live. Of course, it will mean the chair.”

The mayor drew a deep breath. MacBride bit him with keen, burning eyes, and nodded toward Kennedy.

“This,” he said, “is Kennedy, of the *Free Press*. Of course, this confession will appear in the first edition.”

He said no more. He shoved the envelope into his pocket and turned to Kennedy. “Come on.”

They went out, arm in arm, and left the mayor standing transfixed in his ornate library.

MacBride went home that night, and his wife cried over his wounded arm, and he patted her head and chuckled and said, “Don’t worry, sweetheart. It’s all over now.”

He had his wound dressed and went to bed and slept ten hours without so much as stirring once. And he was awakened in the morning by his wife, who stood over his bed with a wide look in her eyes and a newspaper trembling in her hands. “

"Steve," she breathed, "look!"

She held the paper in front of him, and he saw, in big, black headlines, three significant words:

"MAYOR COMMITS SUICIDE."