

Wise Guy

Frederick Nebel

FEW PULP WRITERS WERE as prolific as Frederick Nebel (1903-1967), who wrote several long-running series, mainly in *Black Mask* and its closest rival, *Dime Detective*, in a career that essentially ended after a single decade (1927-1937). His crimefighting heroes are tough and frequently violent, but they bring a strong moral code to their jobs, and a level of realism achieved by few other pulp writers.

Homicide Captain Steve MacBride, who is as tough as they come, and his ever-present sidekick, *Free Press* reporter Kennedy, who provides comic relief in most of the thirty-seven stories in which they appear, was a *Black Mask* fixture for nearly a decade.

Donny "Tough Dick" Donahue of the Interstate Agency, with twenty-one adventures, all in *Black Mask*, ran from 1930 to 1935; a half-dozen of the best were collected in *Six Deadly Dames* (1950).

The stories featuring Cardigan, an operative for the Cosmos Detective Agency, nearly fifty in all, ran from 1931 to 1937 in the pages of *Dime Detective*; the best of them were published in *The Adventures of Cardigan* (1988).

Both of Nebel's novels were filmed: *Sleepers East* (1933) in 1934 and *Fifty Roads to Town* (1936) in 1937.

"Wise Guy," a MacBride and Kennedy story, was first published in *Black Mask* in April 1930.



Wise Guy

Frederick Nebel



I LDERMAN TONY MARATELLI walked up and down the living-room of his house in Riddle Street. Riddle was the name of a one-time tax commissioner. Maratelli was a fat man, with fat dark eyes and two generous chins. His fingers were fat, too, and the fingers of one hand were splayed around a glass of Chianti, from which at frequent intervals he took quick, sibilant draughts. Now an Italian does not drink Chianti that way. But Maratelli looked worried. He was.

The winter night wind keened in the street outside and shook the windows in a sort of brusque, sharp fury. Riddle Street is a dark street. Also a windy one. That is because one end of it disembogues into River Road, where the piers are. One upon a time Riddle Street was

aristocratic. Then it became smugly middle-class and grudgingly democratic. Then proletariat. Other streets around it went in for stores and warehouses and shipping offices. But Riddle Street clung to its brownstone fronts and its three-step stoops. It was rated a decent street.

Maratelli stopped short as his five-year-old daughter bowled into the room wearing a variety of night attire known as teddy bears.

“Night, poppa.”

Maratelli put down the glass of Chianti, picked up the baby and bounced her playfully up and down on the palms of his fat hands.

“Good-night, angel,” he said.

His wife, who was taller than he, and heavier, came in and smiled and held out her arms.

"Give her to me, Tony," she said.

"Yes, mama," said Maratelli. "Put her to bed and then close that door. Captain MacBride will be here maybe any minute."

"You want to be alone, Tony, don't you?"

"Yes, mama."

She looked at him. "It's about. . ."

"Yes, mama. Please take angel to bed and then you, too, leave me alone."

"All right, Tony." She looked a little sad.

He laughed, and his ragtag mustache fanned over his mouth. He pinched the baby's cheeks, then his wife's, then marched with her to the inner door. They went out, and he closed the door and sighed.

He went over to the table, picked up the glass of Chianti and marched up and down the room. His broad, heavy shoes thumped on the carpet. He wore a henna-colored shirt, a green tie, red suspenders and tobacco-brown pants. His shoes creaked.

When the bell rang, he fairly leaped into the hallway. He snapped back the lock and opened the door.

"Ah, Cap! Good you come!"

MacBride strolled in. He wore a neat gray Cheviot overcoat, a flap-brimmed hat of lighter gray. His hands were in his pockets and he smoked a cigar.

"Slow at Headquarters, so I thought I'd come down."

"Yes—yes—yes."

Maratelli closed the hall door. The lock snapped automatically. He hustled into the living-room, eyed a Morris chair, then took a couple of pillows from the lounge, placed them in the Morris chair and patted hollows into them. He spread his hands towards the chair.

"Have a nice seat, Cap."

"Thanks."

"Give me the overcoat and the hat."

"That's all right, Tony."

MacBride merely unbuttoned his coat, sat down and laid his hat on the table. He was freshly shaven, neatly combed, and his long, lean face had the hard, ruddy glint of a face that knows the weather. He leaned back comfortably, crossing one leg over the other. The pants had a fine crease, the shoes were well polished, and the laces neatly tied.

"Chianti, Cap?"

"A shot of Scotch'd go better."

"Yes—yes—yes!"

Maratelli brought a bottle from the side-board, along with a bottle of Canada Dry.

"Straight," said MacBride.

Maratelli took one with him, said, "Here's how," and they drank.

MacBride looked at the end of his cigar.

"Well, Tony, what's the trouble?"

The wind kept clutching at the windows. Maratelli went over and tightened a latch. Then he pulled up a rocker to face MacBride, sat down on the edge of it, lit a twisted cheroot and

took a couple of quick, nervous puffs. He stared vacantly at MacBride's polished shoe.

Finally—"About my boy Dominick."

"H'm!"

"You know?"

"Go on, Tony."

"Yes—yes. Look, Cap, I'm a good guy. I'm a good wop. I got a wife and kids and business and I been elected alderman and—well, I'm a pretty good guy. I don't want to be on no racket, and I don't want any kind of help from any rough guys in the neighborhood. I been pestered a lot, Cap, but I ain't gonna give in. I got a wife and kids and a good reputation and I want to keep the slate what you call pretty damn clean. Cap, I ask you to come along here tonight after I been thinking a lotta things over in my head. I need help, Cap. What's a wop gonna do when he needs help? I dunno. But I ask you, and maybe you be my friend."

"Sure," said MacBride. "Get it off your chest."

"This wop—uh—Chibbarro, you know him?"

"Sam Chibbarro?"

"Yes—yes—yes."

"Uhuh.""

"Him."

"What about him?"

Maratelli took a long breath. It was coming hard, and he wiped his face with his fat hand. He cleared his throat, took a drink of Chianti and cleared his throat again.

"Him. It's about him. Him and my boy Dominick. You know my boy Dominick is only twenty-one. And—and—"

"Going around with Chibby?"

"Yes—yes. Look. This is it, and Holy Mother, if Chibby knows I talk to you—" He exhaled a vast breath and shook his head. "Look. I have lotsa trucks, Cap, being what I am a contractor. I have ten trucks, some big, some not that big. Chibby—uh—Chibby he wants my trucks for to run booze at night!"

MacBride uncrossed his legs and put both heels on the floor. He leaned forward and, putting the elbow of one arm on his knee, jack-knifed the other arm against his side. His eyes, which had a windy blue look, stared point-blank at Maratelli.

"And you?"

"Well—" Maratelli sat back and spread his hands palmwise and opened his eyes wide—"me, I say no!"

"How long has this been going on?"

"Maybe a month."

"And Dominick. Where does he come in?"

Maratelli fell back in his chair like a deflated balloon. "That is what you call *it*, Cap. He is very good friends. He thinks Chibby is a great guy. He says I am the old fool."

MacBride looked at the floor, and his eyelids came down thoughtfully; the ghost of a curl came to his wide mouth, slightly sardonic.

Maratelli was hurrying on—"Look, Cap. My Dominick is a good boy, but if he keeps friends with that dirty wop Chibbarro it is gonna be no good. I can't stand for it, Cap. And what

can I do with Dominick? He laughs at me. Puts the grease on his hair and wears the Tuxedo and goes around with Chibby like a millionaire. Dominick has done nothing bad yet, but if this Chibby— Look, Cap, whatcha think I'm gonna do?"

MacBride sat back. "Hell, Tony, I've had a lot of tough jobs in my day, but you hand me a lulu. It's too bad. You've got my sympathy, and that's no bologney. I'll think it over. I'll do the best I can."

"Please, Cap, please. Every night Dominick goes out with Chibby. Dominick ain't got the money, so Chibby he pays the bills. And where do they go? Ah—the *Club Naples*, and places like that, and women—Holy Mother, it ain't good, Cap! My wife and my baby—I ask you, Cap, for my sake."

"Sure, Tony."

MacBride stood up.

Maratelli stood up, his breath whistling in his throat. "But if Chibby knows I speak to you—"

"He won't," clipped MacBride.

He buttoned his coat, put on his hat and shoved his hands into his pockets. "I'll be going."

"Have another drink."

"Thanks—no."

Maratelli let him out into the street and hung in the doorway.

"Night, Cap."

"Night, Tony."

MacBride was already swinging away, his cigar a red eye in the wind.

II

Jockey Street was never a good street. It was the wayward offspring of a wayward neighborhood. Six blocks of it made a bee line from the white-lights district to the no-lights district, and then petered off into the river.

The way was dark after the third block, except for a solitary electric sign that winked seductively in the middle of the fourth. It projected over the sidewalk, and the winking, beckoning letters were painted green:

L U C B N A P L E S

MacBride did not come down from the bright lights. He came up from River Road, up from the bleak, unlovely waterfront. He still walked with his hands in his pockets, and the wind blew from behind, flapping his coat around his knees.

A man in a faded red uniform with tarnished gold braid stood in front of the double doors. As MacBride drew near, the man reached back and laid his hand on the knob. He opened the door as MacBride came up, and MacBride went inside.

The ante-room was quite dim, and the sound of a jazz band was muffled. To the right was a cloak-room, and the girl came over to take Mac-Bride's coat. But MacBride paid no attention to her. A man came forward out of the dim-lit gloom, peering hard. He wore a Tux, and he had white, doughy jowls and thin hair plastered back, and he was not so young.

"Your eyesight bad, Al?" chuckled MacBride.

"Oh . . . that you, Cap?"

"Yeah."

"Cripes, I'm glad to see you, Cap!"

He grabbed MacBride's hand and wrung it. MacBride stood still, slightly smiling, his face in shadow, and Al laughed showing a lot of uncouth teeth.

This was Al Vassilakos, a Greek who went over big with the wops and who was on speaking terms with the police. Mike Dabracchio really started the joint, a couple of years ago, but Mike talked out of turn to the old Sciarvi gang, and Sciarvi told Mike to go places. Al was instated by Sciarvi himself, and when Sciarvi got himself balled up—and subsequently shot—in a city-wide gang feud, Al carried on with the club. He'd kept clean since then, but Sam Chibbarro, called Chibby, was back, and MacBride had his doubts.

It looked as if Al was a little put out at MacBride's imperturbable calm.

"You—you looking for some guy, Cap?"

"No. Just wandering around, Al. How's business?"

"Pretty good."

"Mind if I sit inside?"

"Glad to have you, Cap."

MacBride took off his overcoat and his hat and gave them to the girl. Al walked with him across the ante-room and opened a door. A flood of light and a thunder of jazz rushed out as MacBride and Al went in. Al closed the door and MacBride drifted over to a small table beside

the wall and sat down. Al signaled to a waiter and motioned to MacBride.

"Snap on it, Joe. That's Captain MacBride from Headquarters. Don't give him none of that cheap alky."

"Okey, boss."

Al went over and put his hands palm-down on the table and asked, "How about a good cigar, Cap? And I've got some good Golden Wedding."

"All right, Al—on both."

"Hey, Joe! A box of Coronas and that bottle of Golden Wedding. Bring the bottle out, Joe."

"Okey, boss."

"Anything you want, Cap, ask me. I'll be outside. I gotta be outside, you know."

"Sure, Al."

Vassilakos went out to the ante-room, but he still looked a bit worried.

It didn't take long for MacBride to spot Sam Chibbarro. Chibby was at a big table near the dance-floor. Dominick was there, too. And MacBride picked out Kid Barjo, a big bruise swelling all out of his Tux. There were some women—three of them. One had red hair and looked rather tall. Another had hair black as jet pulled back over the ears. The third was a little doll-faced blonde and she was necking Dominick. MacBride recognized her. She was Bunny Dahl, who used to hoof with a cheap burlesque troupe and was for a while mama to Jazz Millio before Jazz died by the gun. The whole party looked tight. A lot of people were there, and many of them looked uptownish.

This Club Naples was no haven for a piker. A drink was two dollars a throw, and the *convert* four. If a hostess sat down with you, your drink or hers was three dollars a throw, and her own drinks were doctored with nine parts Canada Dry. A sucker joint.

Joe brought the bottle of Golden Wedding and a fresh box of cigars. MacBride took one of the cigars, bit off the end, and Joe held a match. MacBride puffed up and Joe went away, leaving the Golden Wedding on the table. MacBride poured himself a drink and watched Chibby and his crowd making whoopee.

Presently Kid Barjo got up, wandered around the table and then flung his arms around Bunny Dahl. Dominick didn't like that, and he took a crack at Barjo, and Chibby stood up and jumped between them. Bunny thought it was a great joke, and laughed. Chibby dragged Barjo to the other side of the table and made him sit down. Barjo was cursing and looking daggers at Dominick.

The jazz band struck up, and Chibby took the red-haired girl and pulled her out to the dance-floor. Barjo sulked and Dominick seemed to be bawling out Bunny. Then Bunny got up in a huff and hurried through a door at the other end of the cabaret. Barjo jumped up and followed her. Dominick took a drink and lit a cigarette and turned his back on the door. But he kept throwing looks over his shoulder. Finally he got up and went through the door, too, not so steady on his feet.

MacBride took another drink and sat back. When the dance was over Chibby and the red-haired girl came back to the table, and Chibby looked around and asked some questions. He shot a look towards the door, cursed and went through it.

MacBride leaned forward on his elbows and watched the door. The jazz band cut loose, and the saxophone warbled. The two girls at

Chibby's table were both talking at the same time, and both of them looked peeved. The small dance-floor was jammed.

Joe came over and said, "Everything okey, Cap?"

"Yeah," said MacBride, watching the door.

"Maybe you'd like a nice sandwich? Al told me to ask you."

"No, Joe."

"Okey, Cap."

"Okey."

Joe turned, swooped down on a table that had been temporarily abandoned by two couples. He swept up four glasses that were only half empty, swept out, and came back with four full ones. He marked it all down on his pad. A gyp-joint waiter has no conscience.

The drummer was singing out of the side of his mouth, "*Through the black o' night, I gotta go where you go.*"

Chibby came out of the door. He was frowning. He walked swiftly to his table, clipped a few words to the girls. They started to get up. He snapped them down. Then he turned and headed towards the ante-room.

"Hello, Chibby," said MacBride.

Chibbarro jerked his head around.

"Jeeze...well, hello, MacBride! Where'd you come from?"

"I've been here—for a while—Chibby."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Hell. . . ain't that funny!"

"Funny?"

"Yeah, I mean funny I didn't see you."

"That is funny, Chibby."

"Yeah, it sure is. See you in a minute, Cap."

Chibby hurried out to the ante-room. MacBride turned his head and looked after him. Chibby looked over his shoulder as he pushed open the door. MacBride squinted one eye. His lips flattened perceptibly against his teeth, and one corner of his mouth bent downward. A curse grunted in his throat, behind his tight mouth. He looked back towards the door at the other end of the dance-floor.

The two girls who had been sitting at Chibby's table were now walking towards the ante-room. MacBride watched them go out. A frown grew on his forehead, then died. Joe came in from the ante-room and stood with his back to the door. He was looking at MacBride. His face was a little pale. He backed out again.

MacBride turned in time to see the door swing shut, but he did not see Joe. He stood up and took a fresh grip on his cigar. He walked towards the door and shoved it open. He stood with the light streaming down over his shoulders.

"Goin', Cap?" asked Al Vassilakos.

MacBride let the door shut behind him. "Where's Chibby?"

Al was standing in the shadows, his face a pale blur. "I guess he went, Cap."

"Where're those two women were with him?"

"They ... all went, Cap."

The red end of MacBride's cigar brightened and then dimmed.

"Al, what the hell's wrong?"

"Wrong? Well, hell, I don't know. They just went out."

MacBride turned and pushed open the door leading into the cabaret. He strode swiftly among the tables, crossed the dance-floor and went through the door at the farther end. This led him into a broad corridor. He stopped and looked around, one eye a-squint. He pushed open a door at his left. It was dark beyond. He reached for and found a switch; snapped on the lights. The room was well-furnished—but empty.

When he backed into the corridor, Al was there.

"What the hell, Cap?"

"Don't be dumb!"

MacBride went to the next door on the right, opened it and switched on the lights. It, too, was empty. He came back into the corridor and bent a hard eye on Al. Then he pivoted and went on to the next door on the left. He opened it and turned on the lights. He looked around. It was empty. There was an adjoining room, with the door partly open.

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

"Pipe down!"

MacBride crossed the room and pulled the door wide open. He felt a draught of cold

night air. He reached around and switched on the lights in the next room.

A table was overturned.

Kid Barjo lay on the floor with a bloody throat.

"H'm," muttered MacBride, and turned to look at Al.

The Greek's jowls were shaking.

MacBride took a couple of steps and bent down over Kid Barjo. He stood up and turned and looked at the Greek.

"Dead, Al. Some baby carved his throat open."

"My God Almighty!" choked Al.

MacBride spun and dived across the room to the open window. He looked out. An alley ran behind. He jumped out and ran along, followed a sharp turn to the right. He saw that the alley led to the street. He ran down it and into Jockey Street. There was no one in sight.

He entered the Club Naples through the front door and returned to the room where the Greek was still standing. He looked at a telephone on the wall.

"Listen, Al. Did Chibby make a call in the lobby?"

"I—I—"

"Come on, Al, if you know what's good for you."

"I think he did."

"Okey. He called whoever was in here when he knew I was outside and they breezed

through this window. And you've been stalling, you two-faced bum!"

"So help me, Cap—"

"Can it! There's one of three people killed this guy."

"Jeeze!"

The Greek fell into a chair, stunned.

MacBride called Headquarters.

Outside in the cabaret the drummer was singing, *"That's what you get for making whoope-e-e-e..."*

Out in the street the green sign blinked seductively:

L U C B N A P L E S

III

Sergeant Otto Bettdecken was eating a frankfurter and roll when MacBride barged into Headquarters followed by Moriarity and Cohen, and Kennedy of the *Free Press*.

MacBride said, "Otto, that guy's full name was Salvatore Barjo; age, twenty-six; address, the Atlantic Hotel. Stabbed twice in the front of the neck."

Bettdecken filled out a blue card and his moon face clouded. "Crime of passion, Cap?"

"Ha!" chirruped Kennedy.

"We don't know yet," said MacBride. "The morgue bus picked the stiff up and I closed the joint for the night."

"How about the Greek?"

MacBride shrugged. "He's free. I want to give him some rope first. He ain't tough enough to worry about. He came across with the names of the three broads. Mary Dahl—the one they call Bunny; there was a red-head named Flossy Roote, and the other broad, the one that was originally with Barjo—she's Freda Hoegh. Flossy's this guy Chibbarro's woman, and I understand Freda's a friend of Bunny's. Chibby lived with Flossy in a flat at number 40 Brick Street. We went down there, but of course they weren't there. I parked Corson on the job. Freda and Bunny have a flat at number 28 Turner Street, but they haven't shown up either. I put De Groot on that job. No doubt they're hiding out, along with Dominick Maratelli."

Bettdecken shook his head. "This'll drive Tony crazy."

"Yeah," said MacBride, and headed for his office.

Moriarity and Cohen and Kennedy trailed after him, and MacBride got out of his overcoat and hung it up. He started a fresh cigar and took a turn up and down the room.

Kennedy leaned against the wall and tongued a cigarette from one side of his mouth to the other.

"That guy Barjo always was a bum welter anyhow."

MacBride snapped, "Which is no reason why he should be knifed in the throat! And this young Dominick—"

"A wise guy," drawled Kennedy. "A young wop just out of his diapers and trying to

be a man about town. I know his kind. In fact, I know Dom. Flash. Jazz. He's not the only slob this jazz racket has taken for a buggy ride. And take it from me, old tomato, he's not going to get out of this with a slap on the wrist."

Moriarity said, "The thing is, after all your gas, Kennedy, who—who *did* poke Barjo in the throat?"

"Well, first the broad—this Bunny Dahl— goes in," said Kennedy. "Then Barjo. Then Dominick. Well—I'd say Dominick."

"Nix," popped Ike Cohen, swinging around from the window.

"No?"

"The broad," said Cohen. "The other guys were just covering her. Cripes, from what Cap says, they were all pretty tight. And the broad, having not much brains, would be the first to pull a dumb stunt like that. What do you say, Cap?"

"Not a hell of a lot," growled MacBride. "I'll leave the theory to you bright boys. I'm just waiting till we nail one of those babies. But as for the broad rating no brains, I don't know. And I don't see where Dominick rates big in brains, either."

Moriarity sat on the desk, dangling his feet. He said, "Anyhow, I'm inclined kind of to think it was the broad. It looks like a dizzy blonde's work."

Kennedy laughed wearily. "Well, if it was, Mory, we'll have a nice time in Richmond City. All the sob-sisters will sharpen up their pencils. Bunny will put a crack in her voice and try to look like a virgin that this guy Barjo tried to ruin. "I did it to save my honor!" Like that. As if she ever had any honor. Listen, I saw that little trollop in a burlesque show one night, down near the river and—"

"All right, all right," horned in MacBride. "We can imagine."

"Anyhow," said Kennedy, "I'll bet it wasn't the broad."

The papers had it next morning. Dominick Maratelli's name was prominent—"wayward son of Alderman Antonio Maratelli."

MacBride, who had gone home at two, was back on the job at noon. There were reports on his desk, but nothing of importance. Chibbarro and Dominick and the three girls were still missing, and none of them had been to their flats following the murder.

The city was being combed thoroughly by no less than a dozen detectives, and every cop was on the lookout too. The fade-away had probably been maneuvered by Chibby. MacBride thought so, anyway, and it struck him as a pretty dumb move on Chibbarro's part. For why should Chibby entangle himself in a murder with which, apparently, he was not vitally concerned?

Tony Maratelli blundered into Headquarters a little past noon. He was shaking all over. He was hard hit.

"Cap, for the love o' God, what am I gonna do?"

"You can't do a thing, Tony."

"Yes, yes. I mean—but I mean, can't I do something?"

"No. Calm yourself, that's all. Dominick's in Dutch, and that's that. I can't save him, Tony."

"But, Holy Mother, the disgrace, Cap! And my wife, you should see her!"

"I know, I know, Tony. I'm sorry as hell for you and the wife, but the kid pulled a bone, and what can we do?"

Tony walked around the office and then he sat down and put his head in his hands and groaned. MacBride creaked in his chair and looked at Tony and felt sorry for him. Here was a wop who had kept his hands clean and tried to attach some dignity to his minor office. His record was a good one. He was a good husband, a square shooter and a conscientious alderman. But what mattered all that to the public when his son ran with a bum like Chibbarro and got mixed up in a drunken brawl that terminated in the killing of Kid Barjo the popular welter?

"You go home, Tony," said MacBride. "There's nothing to do but hope for the best."

Tony went home. He dragged his feet out of Headquarters, and he looked dazed. This was tragedy, no less. It was the tragedy of a good man tainted by the blood of his kin. And it is the warp and woof of life; you can't choose your heritage, nor can you choose your offspring. A man in public office is a specimen eternally held beneath the magnifying glass of public opinion, and public opinion can metamorphose a saint into a devil.

The police net which MacBride had caused to be flung out, seemed not very effective. Three days and three nights passed. No one was apprehended. Kid Barjo was buried, and Moriarity and Cohen attended the funeral—not from any feeling of sorrow or respect for the newly dead. But—sometimes—killers turn up when the dead go down. That was one of the times they didn't.

At the end of a week the *News-Examiner* printed a neatly barbed editorial relative to the inability of certain police officials to cope with existing crime conditions. The innuendo was thrown obliquely at MacBride, who took it with a curse. The editorial made much of the fact

that a representative of the law had been in the Club Naples at the time of the killing. . . .

"Of course I was there," MacBride told Kennedy. "But I had no reason to suppose that a murder was in the wind. Drunks will be drunks, and I give any guy a decent break."

"Some folks think you're getting soft, Cap," smiled Kennedy.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

MacBride creaked in his chair and wagged a finger at Kennedy. "You tell those—folks, Kennedy, that I'm just as tough today as I was twenty years ago."

"Have you seen any more of Tony Maratelli?"

"No—not since the day after the killing. I told him to go home and calm down."

There was a knock on the door, but before MacBride could reply, it burst open and Sergeant Bettdecken stood there, a banana in one hand and his face all flushed.

"God, Cap, I just got a call from Scofield! There's hell in Riddle Street. Uh—the front of Tony Maratelli's house been blown off!"

"Ain't that funny?" said Kennedy. "We were just talking about him."

MacBride bounced out of his chair and reached for his hat and coat.

IV

There was a crowd in Riddle Street.

The night was dark, but the red glow of the burning house lit up part of the street. Fire engines were there, and hose lay like great black serpents in the lurid glow, and the black rubber coats and helmets of firemen gleamed as they shot water into the flames.

The water fell back into the street and froze and glazed the pavements. Behind the fire lines stood men pointing and talking; and there were women with shawls around their heads and with coats flung hastily over night-dresses. There were a few women with children in arms.

A sleek red touring car with a brass bell on the cowl drove up and the fire chief, white-haired beneath his gold-braided cap, got out and looked up at the flames and had a few words with a lieutenant.

Part of the house wall caved in with a muffled roar, and dust and smoke billowed, and some of the onlookers cried out. A couple of patrolmen kept walking up and down and pushing back those who tried to edge in beyond the lines.

MacBride arrived in a police flivver driven by Hogan. Kennedy was in the back seat with him.

MacBride got out and shoved his hands into the pockets of his neat gray cheviot and looked around and then spotted Patrolman Scofield. Scofield came over and saluted and MacBride asked:

"Where's Tony?"

"In that house across the street—number 55."

"Anybody hurt?"

"Tony got a bash on the head, that's all. His wife wasn't hit, but she's pretty hysterical."

"Where were you when this place was blown?"

"Three blocks up River Road. I heard it and came on the run."

"I'll take a look at Tony."

He went into number 55. The hall-door was open, and there were some people in the hall. The sitting-room was off to the right, and MacBride saw a white-coated ambulance doctor sitting on a chair and listlessly smoking a cigarette. Tony was sitting on another chair wrapped in a heavy bathrobe and staring into space. His wife was sitting on a cot, holding her baby in her arms and moaning and rocking from side to side. Several women were grouped around her, trying to comfort her, and one held a glass of water.

MacBride drifted into the room, looked everybody over with quick scrutiny, and then went over and stood before Tony. After a moment Tony became aware of his presence and looked up and tried to say something, but he could only shake his head in dumb horror. MacBride took one hand out of his pocket and laid it on Tony's shoulder and pressed the shoulder with brief but sincere reassurance.

"Snap out of it, Tony."

"Holy Mother. . . . Holy Mother. . . ."

"I know, I know. But snap out of it. You're alive. Your wife and baby're alive."

"Like—like the end of the world. . . ."

MacBride caught his toe in the rung of a chair and slewed it nearer. He sat down and took a puff on his cigar and then took the cigar from his mouth and braced the hand that held it on his knee.

"You've got to snap out of it, Tony. . . ."

Tony winced. "Out of bed I was throwed...out of bed . . . like—" He groaned and put his hands to his head.

MacBride looked at the cigar in the hand on his knee and then looked up at Tony. "Were you asleep when it happened?"

"Yes ... I was asleep. The wall fell in. . . ."

"Did you get any warning before-hand? I mean, was there any threatening letter?"

"No—no."

"Well, try to snap out of it, Tony. I'll see you again."

MacBride got up and put the cigar back in his mouth and his hands back in his pockets. He looked around the room, his windy blue eyes thoughtful. Then he went out into the hallway and so on out into the street. He stood at the top of the three stone steps and watched the firemen pouring water into the demolished house. The flames had died, but the water was still hissing on hot beams.

Kennedy came out of the crowd, his face in shadow but the red end of a cigarette marking out his mouth. From the bottom of the steps he said:

"Now why do you suppose they chucked a bomb at Tony's house, Cap?"

"Who chucked a bomb?" said MacBride.

"Are we thinking about the same guys?"

MacBride went down the steps. "Yeah, I guess so. But I don't know why."

"Let's go back to Headquarters and get a drink."

"I'm hanging around a while," said MacBride.

Half an hour later water stopped pouring into the ruins. The firemen began to draw in the hose. The front of the building had disappeared. You could look into the lower and upper stories and see the debris.

MacBride went over and had a few words with the chief. He borrowed a flashlight from one of the firemen and went up the blackened stone steps. He climbed over the broken door and swung his flash around. He stepped from one broken beam to another and finally reached the living-room. The floor was slushy with black ashes that had been soaked by the water. The smell was acrid. He looked at the chair wherein he had sat one night and talked with Tony. It was burnt and broken.

He proceeded over fallen plaster that was gummy beneath his feet and reached a stairway. He climbed this and came to the floor above. The white beam of his flash probed the tattered darkness. Overturned chairs, beds soaked with water and blackened with soot. Tony's home in ruin. . . . He sighed.

There were three bedrooms, and he went from one to another, and looked around and meditated over several things, and then he went down by the cluttered stairway and worked his way back to the street.

He returned the flashlight to the fireman and said, "Thanks."

He stood on the curb, his chin on his chest and his hands in his pockets. Presently he was aware of Kennedy standing beside him.

"Where've you been, Cap?"

"Places," said MacBride.

"What did you see?"

"Things."

V

Tony Maratelli stood by the window of number 55 Riddle Street and looked across at the epitaph of his home.

It was not a pleasant sight, in the sharp clear light of a winter morning. He could see the broad bed wherein he and his wife were used to sleeping; the smaller bed in another room wherein his daughter had narrowly escaped death; the other room and the other bed that were Dominick's. . . .

Tony looked sad and haggard, and when a fat man looks haggard it is in a way pathetic. A couple of men were already at work removing the debris from the sidewalk, and a policeman walked back and forth, guarding what remained of Tony's possessions.

Of course, mused Tony, he would have a nice house again, somewhere. He had plenty of money. But—that house was an old one, and he had lived there for fifteen years—first as tenant, then as owner. It had been one of the milestones of his success as a building contractor. Wherefore its ruin made him feel sad. He pulled his heavy bathrobe tighter about his short, adipose body and sniffed.

He saw MacBride come down the opposite side of the street, pause to have a talk with the patrolman on duty, then run his eyes over the ruined house. Tony's eyes steadied. He licked his lips. MacBride was his friend, but...

The captain turned abruptly and crossed the street. Tony waited for the sound of the doorbell. It came. Mrs. Reckhow, who had been good enough to give him and his family shelter overnight, appeared from another room.

But Tony said, "It's for me, Mrs. Reckhow, thanks."

"All right, Mr. Maratelli," she said, and disappeared.

Tony went out into the hall and opened the door and MacBride said, "Morning, Tony," and walked in.

They came back into the living-room and MacBride took off his hat, looked at it, creased the crown and then laid the hat on a table.

"How you feeling, Tony?"

"Not so good. I feel rotten, Cap. Yeah, I feel rotten."

His black hair was tousled about the ears and he needed a shave and his jowls seemed to hang forlornly towards his shoulders.

MacBride, who had had only six hours sleep, looked fresh and vigorous. He went over by the window and looked at the men working on the sidewalk and then he turned around and looked at Tony.

"Tony," he said, and looked at the floor, pursing his lips.

"Uh?" came Tony's voice from somewhere in the roof of his mouth.

"Tony . . . about Dominick."

Tony wiped a hand in front of his face as though he were brushing away a spider-web. "Uh ... you found him?"

"No."

"Oh ... I thought you found him."

"No, I didn't find him."

"Oh." His voice was weary, coming out like weary footsteps.

MacBride brought his eyes up from the floor and fastened them on Tony's eyes and seemed to screw down the bolts of his gaze with slow but sure precision.

"We'd better talk plain, Tony."

Tony's eyes glazed and seemed to stare as though at something beyond MacBride's shoulder.

"Plain," said MacBride, his voice going down.

"Well..." Tony shrugged and looked around the room as if there was something there he wanted.

MacBride clipped, "How long was Dominick in your house before they blew the front off?"

Tony muttered, "Holy Mother!" and sat down heavily in a chair.

"How long, Tony?"

"Look, Cap! Could I go and give my boy up when he come to me for protection, crying like a baby? Could I? Didn't my wife she plead with me, too? But she did not have to plead, no. Dominick is my son, my flesh and blood, and if his father will not give him protection, who will? He is only the boy, Cap! He—"

"Now, wait a minute, Tony," broke in MacBride. "I can guess all that. What I want to know is, how long was he there?"

"Three days—just three days. But—I couldn't go tell you, Cap! The boy he ask me to protect him. He is sorry. He is sorry he got

mixed up with that Chibby. He didn't do nothing, Cap. He didn't kill that box-fighter—"

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

"Tony. . . ."

"Please to God, I don't know!"

A muscle jerked alongside MacBride's mouth. "Dominick knew! He told you!"

"No—no!"

"Tony"—MacBride's voice was like a keen wind far off—"Tony, I've given you every break I could. I know you're a good guy—the best wop I've ever known. But—you've got to come clean. Listen to me: I'm being razzed for that killing. You know why—because I happened to be in Al's joint when these bums got soused and Barjo got knifed. But aside from that—even if I wasn't razzed—I'd want the killer just the same—"

"But Dominick he didn't kill—"

"Don't go over that. He must have told something. What did he tell you?"

Tony spread his arms and looked as if he were going to cry. "Nothing, Cap." And he kept wagging his head from side to side. "Didn't I keep asking him? Sure. Didn't I beg him to tell me? But he don't tell. He just say he didn't kill Barjo—and he swear by the cross and kiss it. Cap, please to God, that is the truth!"

MacBride took one hand out of his pocket and rubbed his jaw and put the hand back into his pocket again. A flush of color was in his lean hard cheeks, and there was a cool subdued fury lurking in his wide direct eyes. His voice became almost laconic:

"All right, then. He was in your house. When did he get away?"

"It must have been when the fire started. I heard him yell from the other room, and then he was gone when I got there. He must have run right out. And now—now, where is he?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. I knew he'd been there when I poked around after the fire. He must have left in a hurry. His dress shirt and his studs were on the dresser, and his Tux was hanging on the wall. That's why I knew he'd been home."

"Yes, he didn't go out once. He was....afraid."

"Sure."

"And now—"

"His life," put in MacBride, "won't be worth two cents if Chibby and his crowd find him. That's why I want to know where he is. He must have run out on the crowd and come home. They're afraid he'll spring something. That's why they crashed your house."

Tony rocked back and forth. "And if I knowed where he is, Cap, sure I'd tell you. I don't want my boy murdered. God, if I only knowed where he is!"

"Listen," said MacBride, "where are you going from here?"

"I think we'll go to a hotel. The Maxim, yes."

"Okey. But remember—if Dominick gets in touch with you, tell me right away. The only safe place for him is in the jail."

"Jail!"

"Now calm yourself. Jail—yes. Let me know when you get in The Maxim."

"Yes." He got up, wobbling about. "Cap, you're my friend, ain't you?"

"Yeah, sure, Tony."

"Thanks, Cap—thanks!" His breath wheezed. "My poor wife, she is all bust up."

"Well, you're not helping her any by slopping all over the place. Buck up. Get a shave. Don't crack up like a damn' hop-head. For crying out loud!"

He laughed bluntly and slapped Tony on the back and went out.

VI

Moriarity and Cohen were trying to get a kick out of playing two-handed Michigan when MacBride breezed into the office. They looked up once and then went on playing while MacBride got out of his overcoat. He came over and sat down and said:

"Deal me a hand."

Cohen said, "Well, how'd you make out?"

"Yes and no. Tony doesn't know a damned thing. But Dominick did come back to his house. He breezed when the place was blown."

"And didn't the kid tell his old man anything?" asked Cohen.

"No."

Moriarity said, "What makes you think Tony was playing ball?"

"I just know it."

Moriarity laughed. "Maybe you are getting soft, Cap."

"Lay off," said MacBride. "Tony's a square wop."

"Then why the cripes didn't he tell you his kid was home?"

MacBride looked at his cards. "You haven't got a kid, have you?"

"Not that I know of."

Cohen laughed. "There's a wisecrack for you, Cap!"

MacBride put four chips on the queen. "Then you wouldn't know, Mory, why the old wop didn't tell me. But he's square."

"Oh, yeah," sighed Moriarity.

"Go ahead," said MacBride, "razz me. I can stand it. If I took you guys and the newspapers seriously I'd jump in the river as a total loss. But you're all just a bad smell to me."

Moriarity laughed. "Poor old Cap!"

"Can that, too! And listen, you gumshoes. We want Dominick. He's lone-wolfing it somewhere. Even you, Mory, would realize that after he left Chibby's crowd and went back home, he wouldn't dare show his mug again with the crowd. You'd realize that, Mory—any dumbbell would."

Cohen said, "Chew on that, Mory."

"And," said MacBride, "we want Dominick before Chibby or one of his guns nails him. They're after him; you can bet your shirt on

that. He knows something, and they're after him."

"At least," said Moriarity, "it crimps Kennedy's idea that Dominick killed Barjo. I still say it was the broad."

Cohen snapped, "Hey, you, it was me first had the idea it was the broad."

"All right, grab the gold ring, guy—grab it."

"My idea may be crimped," said Kennedy, a new voice in the doorway. "But if it was the broad, why the hell should Chibbarro be going to such great pains to keep Dominick and the three girls and himself out of sight?"

"Now you've asked something, Kennedy!" chopped off MacBride.

Kennedy strolled in and said, "All right, Mory. I was wrong, let's say, on picking Dominick as the killer. I was wrong. Now, you bright young child, *why* is Chibbarro playing hide-and-seek?"

Mory put on a long face. "Well, if the broad was his friend—"

"Bologney!" chuckled Kennedy. "She was just a broad. Chibby wouldn't waste a sneeze on her if there wasn't a reason. If she killed Barjo, and there wasn't a good reason for his trying to hide her, that bum would have come right out and told Cap what she'd done. But he *had* to save her—for a reason. That's how much you know, Mory."

MacBride had to chuckle, and he looked at his right-hand men. "Boys, you're both good cops. In a fight, you're the berries. But take my advice and don't try to figure things out too closely. Not when this wiseacre Kennedy is roaming about."

"I'll put your name in the paper twice for that tomorrow," said Kennedy. "But get Dominick, and make him talk. I'm not saying the broad killed Barjo. I'm saying that *if* she killed him, then there's something bigger behind this job than just a ham welter getting a knife in his gizzard."

"Kennedy," said MacBride, "sometimes you're a pain in the neck, but today you're an inspiration."

"Three times in the paper tomorrow, Cap. Two more cracks like that and I'll see about getting you a headline."

"And another crack like that, Kennedy, and I'll plant my foot in your slats."

"Ah, well," grinned Kennedy, "boys will be boys. How about a drink?"

MacBride dragged out a bottle of Dewar's.

VII

In a way of speaking, Dominick Maratelli was between the devil and the deep sea. That is reckoning, of course, on the conjecture of MacBride that Dominick had dropped the mob and that the mob was seeking him. The mob...and the law.

Moriarity and Cohen worked overtime on the hunt. Precinct plainclothes men worked too. And uniformed cops.

It was believed that when Dominick took hasty flight from the bombed house, he was broke. A man must eat. He must sleep somewhere. It was winter, and streets and alleys do not make comfortable lodgings.

Nor was MacBride idle. He too, roamed the streets and made inquiries at lunch-rooms, speakeasies; and most of his roaming was done during the dark hours. He went alone, looking into the twenty-five-cent-a-night flophouses, conning the bread-lines in North Street.

There was no clue yet as to the whereabouts of Chibby and the three girls. And MacBride was eternally aware of the fact that Dominick's life depended on who found him first. Tony kept calling constantly...but there was no news.

And in the middle of the next week there was an article in the papers relative to the fact that Antonio Maratelli had resigned as alderman. Of course, the political powers that be had asked him to resign—a request that was by way of being a threat. Tony made no kick. He was more interested in saving his son.

Kennedy said, "If you ask me, Cap, that young wise guy Dominick deserves to be bumped off. There his old man got a nice political job, and was kind of proud of it, and then this young pup pulls a song and dance that the old man has to pay for. The reward of virtue is most certainly a kick in the pants."

MacBride tightened his jaw a little harder and continued to roam the streets. . . .

There was a black cold night when he wandered into a dark windy street and saw a familiar green sign blinking seductively:

**L U
C B
N A P L E S**

As he drew nearer, he could hear the uniformed doorman beating cold feet on the cold pavement.

MacBride came up in the shadow of the houses and the doorman reached back for the doorknob. He did not recognize MacBride until the captain's foot was on the step, and then he seemed to hesitate in perplexed indecision.

MacBride looked at him and said, "Well?"

"Oh...hello, Cap. Didn't recognize you." He opened the door.

MacBride walked into the dim, stuffy anteroom and stood just inside the door and looked around. The coat-room girl came over but MacBride shook his head and she recognized him and bit her lip and retreated back into the gloom. A stiff white shirt-front came out of another corner of the gloom, and a voice said:

"Well, buddy?"

"I'm MacBride."

"Oh...yeah."

"Where's Al?"

"I'm Patsy. It's all right. What can I do for you?"

"Get me Al."

"Well, he ain't here right now."

"Where is he?"

"I dunno. He went out about an hour ago. If you want to wait for him—there's a little room off here."

"I don't want to wait for him."

"Well, I'm sorry, Cap."

Muffled was the racket of the jazz band.

MacBride turned and pulled open the door and stepped out and looked up and down the street.

The doorman was gone.

MacBride's hands were in his pocket, and the hand in his right pocket closed over the butt of his gun. He moved towards the narrow alley that flanked one side of the building and led to the courtyard in the rear. He looked down it and he flexed his lips and then he entered the alley and walked lightly but rapidly.

He reached the courtyard in the rear. He saw a door and a lighted window, but the shade was drawn down. He moved towards the door and grasped the knob and turned it and the door gave and opened on a crack. He pushed it wide and stepped into a corridor that was dimly lighted by shaded wall lights. He had been in this corridor once before. He closed the door behind him.

From the door farthest away on the right he saw Dominick step out, and behind him the doorman and Al Vassilakos. He started to rap out a command, but Dominick, who was on the point of making for the rear door, saw him and spun and ran in the opposite direction.

"Hey, you!" shouted MacBride.

He barged down the corridor past Al and the doorman. Through the door at the end he burst into the noisy cabaret. The jazz band was hooting and people were dancing. Dominick was running alongside the tables and making for the front. MacBride sailed after him, and the jazz band petered off and the dancers stopped and stared with amazement. MacBride bowled over a drunk that teetered into his path and reached the door to the ante-room six jumps behind Dominick. The door banged in his face, and as he flung it open he saw the front door slam shut.

He streaked through the ante-room and cannoned out in the cold dark street. He heard running footsteps and saw Dominick heading for River Road. MacBride took up the chase and pulled his gun out of his pocket.

"Hey, you, Dominick!" he shouted.

But Dominick kept running.

They were nearing River Road when MacBride raised his gun and fired a high warning shot. He saw Dominick duck and run closer to the shadows of the houses. He fired another shot, bringing it closer but still reluctant to kill.

Suddenly beneath the arc-light that stood on the corner of Jockey Street and River Road, he saw a uniformed policeman appear. At the same time Dominick cut across to the opposite side of the street. The policeman crossed too, to head him off, and then Dominick swerved back into the center of the street and turned around, ran this way and that, and finally stopped and crouched.

MacBride reached him first and clipped, "Now put your hands up, kid!"

"I—I'll—"

"You'll shut up! Is that you, Zelloff? Frisk him. I don't think he's got anything, but frisk him."

Patrolman Zelloff went through Dominick quickly and deftly. "Naw, not a thing, Cap."

MacBride took out manacles and locked Dominick's hands behind his back. Then he shoved his gun back into his pocket. Dominick was shivering with the cold. He wore no overcoat.

MacBride said, "Zeloff, go back to the Club Naples and pinch Al and bring him to Headquarters. I'll take this bird along in a cab."

"Okey, Cap."

"And close the joint."

"Sure."

MacBride grabbed Dominick's arm and walked with him towards River Road.

"For cripes sake, Cap, listen. Al hasn't done a thing—"

"Shut up. *Hey, taxi!*"

VIII

The light with the green shade hung over the shiny flat-topped desk and the light umbrellaed outward over the desk and included in its radiance Dominick and MacBride, who sat and faced each other across the desk.

Dominick was thin and a black stubble was on his face and black circles were beneath his eyes, but there was also black mutiny in his eyes. He had on a shirt beneath his thin coat, but no collar, and his black hair was rumpled but still a bit shiny from the last application of hair oil.

"You," said MacBride, "you caused all this."

"Well, why the hell bring it up?"

"I intend bringing it up and up. You're just a wise guy who tried to run with big, bad boys. You worried hell out of your father and mother. Because of you your father's house was blown up. Because of you your father lost his

aldermanic job. Now what the hell kind of a break do you suppose you deserve?"

"Did I ask for a break? Did I?"

"Of course not. But you're expecting one. What I want to know is, who killed Barjo?"

"I don't know."

"You mean you don't feel like telling me."

"About that."

MacBride leaned forward and put his elbows on the table and drew his brows close down until they almost met at the top of his nose. "Dom, my boy, you're going to spring what you know."

"Like hell I am."

"Like hell you are."

"Listen, you. I didn't kill Barjo. You've got nothing on me—not a thing! I didn't kill him."

"Why did you drop out of sight?"

"That's my business."

"Why did you sneak home and hide away?"

"That's my business too."

MacBride put his voice down low. "We know of course that Chibby is after you."

"You don't know anything."

MacBride snapped, "Listen to me, you little two-tongued dago! I'm giving your old man a break. I'm trying to give you a break—not because I like you—but because I like your old man! As for you, I think you're a lousy pup! But

get this—get it!—I want Chibby or one of the broads was on that party the night Barjo got knifed. I don't care what the hell one I get, I want one of them! And you—you're going to play ball with me or, by cripes, I'll whale hell out of you!"

"I'm not playing ball!" rasped Dominick. "I was on that party, I know that. But I didn't do a thing to anybody. And I ain't going to squeal!"

"You poor dumb slob!" MacBride half rose out of his chair and planted his palms on the desk. "Don't you realize that Chibby wants to blow your head off? Don't you realize that we're the only guys can save you?"

Dominick was biting his lip and his black eyes were jerking back and forth across the desk. He shook his head. "I—I ain't going to say a thing."

The door opened and Patrolman Zeloff shoved in Al Vassilakos. "There he is, Cap."

"Okey, Zeloff. Hello, Al. What the hell are you looking all hot and bothered about?"

"This—this is a dirty trick, Cap!"

"Is it? Listen to me, Al. I've given you all the breaks you're going to get. You were harboring a fugitive from the law."

"I wasn't!" choked the Greek. "So help me, I wasn't. This guy came to me and asked me to give him some jack so he could blow the town. He didn't have no jack. I gave him hell for coming around."

Dominick cut in, "He didn't do anything, Cap. I went there and asked him for some jack, just like he said."

"Sure," said Al, waving his hand. "See?"

"All right, all right," said MacBride. "I see. But you've always tried to kid me, Al, and you'll warm your pants here a while. I don't like your joint. You're two-faced as hell. And I don't like you. Zeloff, put this guy in the cooler for a while."

"Okey, Cap."

"Aw, say, Cap," said Al, "give me a break."

"Break? I'm through giving guys breaks."

"Aw—"

"Come on, you!" snapped Zeloff, and pulled Al out into the hall.

MacBride swung around in his chair, sitting bolt upright, and threw his gaze across the desk like two penetrating beams of blue fire.

"You see the kind of a palooka you went to looking for help! The first yap out of him is to save his own face!"

"Well, d' you see me yapping?"

"Dominick ..." MacBride said the word with deadly softness as he leaned back. "Dominick, I warn you, you're in for a beating if you don't come across. I don't care if you are Tony's son. I'm trying to give you a break, but maybe I'll have to break you first. You can be nice ... or I can be—nasty. Do you get me?"

Dominick drew his face up tightly and pinched his brows down over his midnight eyes. "You can't lay a hand on me!"

"I don't—personally. I've got men who do it for me."

"Yah, you're just the bull-doing cop I heard you were! Just a big flat-foot! Just a big, loudmouthed tough guy!"

"Just," said MacBride, "that."

Dominick jumped up, a lean shaft of vibrating dark fire. "You won't beat me! You won't! By-God Almighty...you *won't*."

"Unless you play ball."

The telephone bell rang. MacBride picked up the instrument.

"Captain MacBride talking," he said. "Yeah, Mory...What?...No, no; go ahead..." He listened, his eyes narrowing "What's that address?...Yeah; 22 Rumford Street. Okey. I'll shoot right down."

He slammed the telephone back to the desk and went to the door and yelled down the corridor. A reserve came on the run.

"Shove this guy in a cell, Mike. I got a date with a good break."

He piled into his overcoat, grabbed his hat and went out into the central room. He called Hogan, and Hogan ran out to get the police flivver. MacBride was waiting for him on the sidewalk.

IX

Rumford Street is on the northern frontier of the city. It is a hilly street, climbing up from Marble Road. A drab street, walled in by three- and four-story rooming-houses. Ordinarily a peaceful neighborhood.

The police flivver swung off Marble Road and labored up the grade. When it was half way

up MacBride saw an ambulance and a small group of people.

"That's it, Hogan."

"Yeah."

The flivver drove up behind the ambulance, and MacBride got out and saw a patrolman and the patrolman saw him and saluted.

"Second floor, Cap."

"Right."

MacBride entered the hall door and climbed the dusty narrow staircase. On the second landing he saw light streaming out through a door, and a policeman was standing in the door. He saw MacBride and stepped aside, and MacBride went into a small livingroom.

Kennedy was sitting on a chair with his feet on a table and his hands clasped behind his back. Cohen was walking back and forth taking quick drags on a cigarette.

"Hello, Cap," he said, and jerked his head towards the next room.

But MacBride had caught sight of a doctor and a couple of uniformed patrolmen and Moriarity standing beside a bed, and there was a pulmotor working. He caught sight, too, of a girl's legs protruding from a nightgown, and then Moriarity turned around and saw him and shrugged and came out.

"It's Bunny Dahl," he said.

"What happened?"

"Gas."

"What—suicide?"

"Dunno. Ike and me stopped in a speakeasy just around on Marble Road. Kennedy was there, and we were just about to start a card game when Patrolman Cronkheiser came busting in looking for a telephone. It seems he was walking his beat down Rumford Street when a woman ran out hollering for help. She lives next door. She'd smelt gas and got up and went out in the hall, and then when she knocked on this door and got no answer she ran out and hollered and Cronkheiser came up and busted in. Bunny was laying on the floor, by one of them gas heaters— there it is."

"How is she?"

"Pretty rotten. They want to try the pulmotor because they think she may pass out before they reach the hospital."

MacBride went in and looked at her and then came back into the other room.

"Queer," he said.

"Yeah," said Kennedy. "Looks as if she got cold feet."

MacBride said nothing for a minute, and then he said, "I got Dominick."

Kennedy's feet fell down from the table. "Things come in bunches, like bananas, don't they? Where'd you get him?"

"Club Naples. He was feeling Al for some jack when I wandered in. I got Al, too. I don't like that two-faced Greek. I'm going to get something on him yet."

"Did he say anything?" asked Moriarity.

"No. The kid's got spirit. He won't squeal. But—he'll have to. Even if we have to beat him."

MacBride turned and looked into the other room and then he rubbed his hand slowly across his jaw. The doctor looked over his shoulder and beckoned, and MacBride came in and stood beside the bed.

"She's trying to say something, Captain."

"What's she trying to say?"

"About a chap named Chibby."

"Oh...Chibby."

MacBride sat down on the edge of the bed and took out a pencil and an old envelope. "Bunny," he said. "What's it all about, Bunny?"

"Chibby ... did it. . ."

"How?"

"He got me drunk...then he tied a rag around my mouth ... so I couldn't yell...then he held my head down by the gas stove ..."

"H'm." One side of MacBride's mouth drew down hard. He leaned closer. "Bunny, where is he?"

"I don't know. ... Al knows."

"Why did he do this to you, Bunny?"

"Because I knew he..." Her voice trailed off.

The doctor said, "We'd better try getting her to the hospital. She hasn't got much of a chance."

"Okey." MacBride stood up. He went back into the other room and said, "Ike, I want you to go to the hospital with Bunny and hang around and see if she says anything more. Mory, you come with me to Headquarters. Al is in for hell."

He went out into the hall and down the narrow dusty stairs. Moriarity followed him, and Kennedy trailed along behind. They all climbed into the flivver, and Hogan started the motor and they drove off.

X

MacBride had removed his hat, but his overcoat was still on and his hands were in his pockets. His face was gray and hard like granite, and his eyes were like blue cold ice, and he stood with his feet spread apart and his square jaw down close to his chest.

Kennedy sat on the desk with his feet on a chair and his elbows on his knees and his hands loosely clasped. Moriarity stood with his back to the radiator and a dead cigarette hanging from one side of his mouth.

Al Vassilakos sat in the swivel-chair with the light streaming brightly into his white puffed face. It was a face that seemed to have been crudely molded out of dough. His knees were pressed together and his toes were turned in and pressed hard against the floor, and his pudgy hands gripped the arms of the swivel-chair.

MacBride said, "You know where Chibby is, Al."

"So help me, Cap—"

"Shut up! You know where he is. I want to know where he is."

"Uh—honest, Cap—"

"Shut up! There's no time for stalling. You've been playing me for the fool and I'm sick of it. I want to know where Chibby is. I'll give you one minute to come across."

He took his left hand out of his pocket and crooked his arm and stared down at the watch on his wrist.

Al gripped the arms of the chair harder with his pudgy hands. His toes screwed against the floor. His white stiff shirt-front moved up and down jerkily. His lower lip, which had been caught under his teeth, flopped out and gleamed wet, and his nose wrinkled and his eyes bulged wildly. His breath was beginning to grate in his throat. His body was straining in the chair, and the chair creaked, and he was stretching his throat in his tight stiff collar, as if fighting for breath. Sweat burst out on his forehead and gleamed like globules of grease, and his whole face, that had been dead like dough, began to twitch and convulse as agitated nerve muscles raced around beneath his skin.

MacBride looked dispassionately at the watch on his wrist. Kennedy seemed interested in his hands. Moriarity's eyes were hidden behind shuttered lids, but he was staring at Al.

MacBride shoved his hand back into his pocket. "Minute's up, Al."

Kennedy looked up from his hands.

Al strained harder in his chair, his white face ghastly in the light that poured down upon it.

"Well, Al?..." MacBride drew his lips flat back against his teeth.

Al choked. "No-no!"

MacBride walked to the door and opened it and called, "Hey, Mike!"

He came back into the room and after a while a patrolman came in buttoning his coat.

"Mike," said MacBride, "take this guy upstairs and put him over the hurdles. You, too, Mory."

The policeman and Moriarity heaved Al out of the chair and dragged him out of the room. Al was blubbing and breaking at the knees.

MacBride closed the door and sat down in the swivel-chair. Kennedy lit a cigarette and shot smoke through his nostrils.

"Bunny sure got hell, didn't she, Cap?"

"Yeah. It's like that song about what you get for making whoopee."

"I wonder what's behind this. I wonder why Chibby tried to bump off the broad. Maybe *he* killed Barjo."

"Maybe."

They didn't talk much. MacBride started a cigar and sat back in his chair, and after a while Kennedy got down from the desk and wandered about the room.

Half an hour later the door opened and Moriarity stood there. He carried his coat under his arm.

"Okey, Cap."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Chibby's hiding out at 95 Hector Street with about six other guns."

"All right, Mory. Put your coat on."

It was a big, powerful touring car that left Headquarters and droned through the dark streets. Hogan was at the wheel. Beside him sat Moriarity and MacBride. In the rear were five policemen and Kennedy. It was half-past two in the morning. The dark streets were empty, and the big car plunged from one into another, and the men in the back swayed from side to side as the car bent sharply around corners.

"This is Hector," said Hogan.

"What's the number?" asked MacBride.

"The numbers begin here," said Kennedy. "That 95 should be about three blocks down."

MacBride said, "Pull up about a block this side, Hogan."

"Okey."

The car slowed down and rolled along leisurely, and presently Hogan swung into the curb and applied the brake.

MacBride got out first and looked up and down the street. The policemen got out and stood around him, and their badges, fastened to the breasts of their heavy blue overcoats, flashed intermittently.

"It must be on the other side of the street," said MacBride. "Come on."

They crossed the street and walked along close to the houses. The houses were set back from the sidewalk and fronted by iron fences, and just behind the fences were depressions and short flights of stone steps that led down to the basement floors. The street lights were few and far between, and the window's of the houses were darkened.

MacBride was saying, "We'll try to get in through the cellar."

They reached number 95 and went in through the gate and crowded noiselessly down the stone steps until their heads were level with the sidewalk. There were two windows, without shades, and the windows were dirty.

"They're supposed to be on the top story," whispered Moriarity.

"And it's four stories," muttered MacBride. "Let's try the windows."

They tried them, but the windows were locked. MacBride stood for a moment thinking. Then—"There's no fire-escapes in front. They must be in the rear. Let's find a way to the rear. The next block."

They came back to the sidewalk and walked on, took the next left turn and then turned left again into the street that paralleled Hector. MacBride counted the houses.

"You might have noticed," said Kennedy, "that 95 was the only four-storied house. The others were three."

"It should be about here," said MacBride.

He mounted the steps and rang the bell. After a few minutes the door opened and an old woman wearing a nightcap looked out.

"Madam," said MacBride, "we're from Police Headquarters. We'd like to pass through your house so that we can get to the one behind it in Hector Street."

"What's the trouble?"

"We're looking for someone."

"Well—well—all right. But waking an old woman up on these cold nights ..."

"I'm very sorry, madam."

She led them through the hall and opened a door in the rear that led into a small yard. Beyond the yard was a low board fence. Beyond the fence was the back of the four-storied house.

"Thank you, madam," said MacBride.

"It's all right, but with my sciatica . . ."

MacBride and the cops and Kennedy passed out into the yard. MacBride scaled the fence and dropped down into the other yard, and the others were close behind.

"There's the fire-escape," he said, and walked towards it.

He was the first to go up. Whatever may be said of him, good or bad, he never hung back in the face of impending danger. If he planned a dangerous maneuver, he likewise led the way, remarking, with ironic humor, that he carried heavy insurance.

He climbed quite noiselessly, and the men were like an endless chain behind him, a dark chain of life moving up the metal ladders. The windows they moved past were black as black slabs of slate. The skirts of their long blue coats swung about their knees as the knees rose and fell with each upward step.

MacBride went slower as he neared the top landing. He stopped and looked back down over the line of men, and right behind him was Patrolman Haviland, and behind Haviland was Patrolman Kreischer, who was getting on in years. And looking at them, MacBride felt a little proud of them.

He looked upward and climbed slowly, and Haviland came up to crowd on one side of him and Kreischer came up to crowd on the other side. They all had their guns out.

MacBride had his out, too, but he reached over and took Haviland's nightstick.

He looked at the window, and then he raised the heavy stick and smashed the glass. He struck four times, and then plunged in through the yawning aperture.

Somewhere in the darkness there was a shout. A split-second later a gun boomed and a flash of fire stabbed the darkness and a bullet slammed into the window frame. MacBride fired around the room and lunged across the floor. He heard a man scream. If he could find a door, then he could find a light-switch, he reasoned.

Someone cannoned into him, and MacBride crashed against the wall. A gun exploded so close to his face that the smoke made him choke. He ducked and sprang away and banged into another twisting body, and ducked away again. He brought up suddenly against a door and then he groped around for the light-switch. He could not find it. A body hurtled against him with such force that the captain went down.

Somebody pulled the door open, and the dim light from the hall filtered in. Two or three forms dived out through the door. MacBride leaped up and lunged towards the door and collided with another man who was trying to get out. Both went down under a rush of four policeman who had not time to recognize MacBride. MacBride disentangled himself in a hurry and heaved up as Haviland was on the point of swinging his nightstick.

"Hey!" shouted MacBride.

"Oh . . . you, Cap!"

Another man came barging out of the door behind a flaming gun, and one of the bullets put a hole through MacBride's new hat but did not budge it the fraction of an inch.

Kreischer fired three times, and the man threw up his hands and screamed, and the momentum of his dive carried him over the banister and crashing down to the hall below.

And in the hall below the cops who had run down were fighting with the men who had opened the door and sought to escape. Somebody in the room had found the light-switch—it turned out to be Kennedy—and the light revealed two gangsters lying dead on the floor and Kennedy mildly scratching his nose, as though he were trying to figure out why the men did not get up.

MacBride ran to the head of the stairs and saw the spurts of gunfire below. He forked the banister backward and slid down with lightninglike speed. He flew off the end and did a backward somersault, and as he was getting up Patrolman Mendelwitz toppled over him groaning and then slid to the floor like a bag of wet meal.

The fighting moved down the next stairway, and MacBride went after it, and Kreischer and Haviland came pounding down behind him. MacBride, going down the staircase, stumbled over a body, but caught hold of the banister and steadied himself. It was the body of a gangster.

MacBride looked over the banister and saw three gangsters backing towards the next landing below. He climbed over the banister, hung out a bit and then dropped. It was a fall of about fifteen feet, and MacBride landed on somebody's shoulders and created a new panic. He saw one of the other gangsters swing towards him, and he recognized Sam Chibbarro, and Chibbarro recognized him. The gunman swung his rod towards MacBride's head, but another body sailed down from above and crashed Chibbarro to the floor. It was Kennedy, unarmed, but effective, nevertheless. The third gangster turned and ran for the head of the next staircase, and Haviland fired along the

banister and got him in the side and the gangster fell against the wall and then slid down to the floor.

Chibbarro flung off Kennedy and bolted, but MacBride, having knocked his own man out, dived for Chibbarro and caught him by the tail of the coat. Chibbarro cursed and tried to get out of his coat, and then he pivoted and his gun swung close. MacBride let go of the coat-tail and caught Chibbarro's gun hand as the gun went off. The shot walloped the floor, and then MacBride swung Chibbarro's arm up and backward and clouted him over the head with the barrel of his own gun. Chibbarro went down like a felled tree.

Kreischer came up on the run, big-footed, and then stopped and watched Chibbarro fall. Then he looked at MacBride and grinned with his beet-red face.

"Himmel!" he said.

"I guess that's that, Fritz," said MacBride. "Hey, Haviland, how is Mandelwitz?"

"He's laying back here and cursing like hell."

"Okey. Then he's all right. Harrigan, find a telephone and call the hospital and then call the wagon. Hey, Sokalov, for God's sake, don't keep pointing that gun this way! It's all over. Put it away."

"All right. ... I forgot, Cap."

MacBride looked around and saw Kennedy leaning against the wall and lighting a cigarette. Kennedy's hat was twisted sideways on his head, and two buttons were gone from his coat, and his face was dirty. He looked comical. MacBride chuckled bluntly.

"How come you're alive, Kennedy?"

"There is a Providence," said Kennedy with mock gravity, "that watches over fools, drunks and bum reporters."

"I always said you were a bum reporter," put in Moriarity.

Kennedy spun away his match. "Imagine a guy like that!"

XII

Dawn was breaking, but the light in the office still streamed down over the flat, shiny desk.

Chibbarro sat in a chair within the radius of the light, his hair plastered down over his ears and forehead and a streak of dried blood on his cheek. His brows were bent, and he scowled at the top of the flat shiny desk.

Moriarity stood with his back to the radiator, and Kennedy had reversed a chair and now straddled it with his arms crossed on the back and his chin on his crossed arms.

MacBride sat in the swivel-chair and looked at Chibbarro.

"You did wrong, Chibby," he said, "to come to Richmond City. It's a tough town."

"Tough hell!"

"Tougher than you are, Chibby. I always wondered why you came here. I'm wondering now why you tried to kill Bunny Dahl."

"She was a chicken-hearted broad!"

"Bad . . . doing what you did, Chibby."

Chibbarro took out his handkerchief and blew his nose. "I been framed all around. That boy scout Dominick—"

"Didn't spring a thing."

"Bah!"

"It was Al."

"The lousy pup!"

MacBride leaned back and put his hands behind his head. "So you didn't kill Barjo."

"No, of course I didn't kill him! D' you think I'm a fool, to put a knife in a guy at a souse party?"

"I didn't think you were so much of a fool. But why did you try to put Bunny out of the way?"

Chibbarro turned his back on MacBride. "You can ask my lawyer all them things."

"That's all right by me, Chibby. But it won't help your case."

The door opened and Ike Cohen walked in. "Hello, Cap—Mory—Kennedy." He looked at Chibbarro. "Hello, Chibby, you small-time greaseball!"

"Go to hell!" said Chibbarro.

"Funny, you are!"

MacBride said, "What news, Ike?"

"The frail just died."

Chibbarro looked up with a start, and his dark eyes widened and horror bulged from the pupils. Then he pulled his face together and crouched sullenly in the chair.

Cohen drew a folded piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to MacBride.

"She regained consciousness long enough to spring this, Cap. It's signed by her and witnessed by the doctor and me."

MacBride unfolded the paper and spread it on the desk. He read it over carefully, then settled back in his chair holding it in one hand.

"Listen to this, gang," he said, and read aloud:

" 'I killed Salvatore Barjo. He was drunk. He followed me into a room in the Club Naples and tried to attack me. I picked up a paper cutter that was laying on the table and stabbed him. Then Dominick came in. Then Chibby came in. Chibby cursed hell out of me, and Dominick yelled at him and said I had to be got out of the jam. Chibby said like hell. Then I said he'd get me out of it or I'd tell what I knew about him. That's why he got me out of it. So we hid out. Then Dominick and Chibby got in a fight and Dominick skinned out. He was a good guy, Dominick. He didn't know what Chibby had up his sleeve. He thought Chibby was just a bootlegger.

" 'Then Chibby got his gang together and they hunted for Dominick to bump him off before the cops got him. Chibby thought Dominick knew more than he did. Chibby came here from Chicago. He was one of the Rizzio gang, and he came here to work up a white slave trade. He got me to work with him, and in the month here I helped him get twelve girls for houses in Dayton and Columbus. That was his real racket, but he wanted to try booze on the side, and he wanted to be friends with Dominick because his old man was alderman, and that might help.

" "When we heard the cops had Dominick I wanted to go to Headquarters and get him out. I was sick of the whole rotten business. Chibby swore he'd kill me, and I dared him. I said I was going, and that I'd say nothing about him. But

he didn't believe me. He got me tight and then he shoved my head down by the gas-heater. I guess he always was a bum.' "

"Hell's bells!" said Kennedy.

MacBride dropped the letter to the desk and got up and walked around the room.

"So that was it, Chibby," he said. "White slaving, eh?"

Chibbarro stared darkly at the shiny top of the desk.

MacBride said, "And you only protected the girl because you knew it was the only way of protecting yourself. God, but you're a louse!"

"Imagine this guy wanting a lawyer!" said Moriarity.

"Yeah," said Cohen. "Ain't he the optimistic slob?"

MacBride picked up the telephone and called a number. After a moment he said, "Hello, Tony. This is MacBride...Now hold your horses. We've got the kid here...Yeah, yeah, he's all right, and he'll get out after a while...What's

that?...No, I'm not going to comfort him. I'll leave that to you. If he was my kid I'd fan him. ... All right, come around when you feel like it."

He put down the telephone and sighed and stared at it for a long moment.

Kennedy pulled a photograph out of his pocket and stared at it.

"She wasn't such a bad-looking frail."

MacBride looked at him. "Where'd you get that?"

"In her bedroom. We'll smear it on the front page of the noon editions."

MacBride went to the window and looked out and saw the red sun coming up over the rooftops. And it occurred to him, without any blur of sentimentality, that Chibby and Dominick and Al were small-timers, and that the girl—this Bunny Dahl—had been stronger than all of them put together.

Kennedy was saying, "It's tough the way sometimes a broad has to die to get her picture in the paper."