



Squidy lay face down  
across Luggan's doorway

# DON'T WAKE THE DEAD

By FRANK MORRIS

*It looked too easy to Detective Luggan when the scared little man paid him five hundred to deliver a package!*

LUGGAN tossed off his drink, took his feet off the desk and yawned hugely. The clock in the Hall of Records tower across dark Spring Avenue said it was ten and time for little private eyes to be in bed. He picked up his coat from the back of the swivel chair, shrugged into it, gathered up the Grant reports and crossed to the office safe. Then the doorknob rattled.

He swung around, frowning. A shadowy figure loomed on the frosted glass door leading to the hall, and the doorknob rattled again, imperatively. Luggan stuffed the Grant reports into his pocket, stepped over, turned the key and flung the door open in one deft motion.

The man who staggered into the office was small and skinny, with a sallow face, pale like the underside of a halibut. He

clutched a round newspaper-wrapped package to his heaving chest and hastily closed the door behind him. He wore a camel's-hair coat over the tan suit that clung to his skinny shoulders. He had a bulging egg-shaped head fringed with coarse dark hair. He sucked in his breath and licked thick red lips fearfully.

"Thank you. Thank you," he said hoarsely. "Are you Mister Rick Luggan, the private investigator?"

Luggan nodded and inspected his caller curiously. Queer bird, this. The guy was hopping around like a Mexican jumping bean, and the end of his nose seemed to tremble.

"Turn out the light," the frightened man said, walking to the window and still clutching the package as if his very life were wrapped up within it. "My name's Horace Squidy. My father died this afternoon, and I'm being followed."

"Quiet down," Rick ordered, switching out the light. "Nobody's going to follow you in here. Why are they after you? How many of them are there?"

A LATE trolley rattled by, and Horace Squidy turned from the window.

"Two of them," he mumbled. "Brutish looking fellows. They've been after me since eight o'clock, when I left father's house."

Horace Squidy placed the round package on Rick's desk and looked at the private detective appealingly.

"I want to hire you for a couple of hours." He yanked out his wallet, extracting a sheaf of bills. "Will five hundred dollars be all right?"

"Five hundred dollars is always all right," Rick clipped, rubbing his square chin thoughtfully, "But it depends on what you're hiring me for. I don't like deals with shyster tricks included. *Comprenez?*"

"Nothing shady, I assure you." Squidy

waggled his cranium like a semaphore. "Just deliver this package to me at Suite 728, Hotel Commander, sometime tonight."

"What's in the package?" Rick's blue eyes were hard and bright.

Horace Squidy's hands fluttered over his coat buttons like frightened white butterflies.

"A wastebasket—a rather important wastebasket," he said.

"I would think so, for five hundred bucks." Rick's voice was dry. "All right, I'll bite. What's in the wastebasket?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing." Horace Squidy's thin lips quivered. "Please, Mr. Luggan. You can inspect the package. I think the men following me want the wastebasket. I can't afford to lose it!"

Rick Luggan stepped abruptly to his desk and ripped the newspaper off the package. The wastebasket was of an ordinary variety, made of twisted rattan, and painted with a design Rick didn't bother to examine. It was empty. Rick turned it over and over, and finally put it back on the desk.

"Anything concealed in the rattan?" he demanded. "Jewels—dope—anything?"

"No." Horace Squidy shook his balding head negatively. "I know it sounds queer, but I can't explain any more just now. Just deliver it to me at the hotel."

"I heard you the first time," Rick said tersely. He picked up the money Squidy had counted out and stuffed it into a pocket. Then Luggan opened a desk drawer and pulled out a printed blank. "All right, sign here," he said pointing to the bottom line. "It's one of our printed contract forms. Merely shows that you hired me to represent you in this case."

While Squidy scratched a dime store pen across the form, Rick glanced quickly around his office. His own wire wastebasket stood beside a filing case in

one corner. Rick gathered it up and wrapped it in newspaper, then put Horace Squidy's wastebasket in his safe, slammed the steel door, and twisted the combination savagely.

Horace Squidy looked bewildered.

"You came in with a package and you leave with a package," Rick said rapidly. "Otherwise, the guys on your tail will know you dropped it here. You go down, hail a cab and go directly to your hotel. I'll tail your shadows. I want to know who those birds are."

"I—I'm scared," Horace Squidy stuttered.

"So am I." Rick Luggan grinned. "I don't like delivering an empty wastebasket—especially when big tough thugs are interested in same," he said shoving the false package into Horace Squidy's thin arms. "But I like five C's pretty well. Let's push, as they say in the Marines."

He followed Horace Squidy through the door into the white-walled corridor, and instantly realized his mistake. Two hulking figures lurched from the dark archway leading to the stairwell, and Rick yanked Squidy backward and reached for his gun. Orange flame blossomed in the darkness and Luggan heard his client scream. Squidy spun sideways and the detective glimpsed agonizing horror on the man's pinched face.

Rick Luggan was mad. Mad at himself for letting his client step into such a trap; mad at the two gunmen who sought to kill him. The shamus dived downward and slithered across the dirty tile floor to the slim protection of the wall. His gun came free of its shoulder brace and he fired at the black stair opening. The shot echoed thunderously in the narrow confines of the hall, and Rick saw fire lance again and again from the killers' guns. Squidy had dropped his package seconds before, to

stumble back along the wall clutching at his chest, then topple face downward across the doorway to Rick's office.

Rick hugged the old tile and grimly fired again. The figures melted back into the stairwell darkness. Once more their guns spat flame, and white-hot pain tore across Luggan's head. He lifted himself to his knees, ran a hand over his face and felt blood run warm between his fingers. The corridor tilted crazily and the stairwell rushed at him like a black angel of doom. A red mist floated over his eyes and he tasted salty tears of pain on his lips. Dimly he heard feet pounding in the hall. Then, like that other time on Saipan, Luggan passed out. . . .

THERE was a pinpoint of light in the abyss, and a thousand blacksmiths pounded angrily on a thousand anvils inside his brain, while a torturing devil stabbed blazing pitchforks of pain into his temples. Luggan lifted his hand and brushed desperately at the curtain of unconsciousness. His tongue moistened parched blood-caked lips and gradually the pinpoint of light took shape and became an electric bulb in the ceiling. He turned his head and recognized the battered outlines of his own oak desk.

Rick groaned and heaved himself to his feet. He waggled his head back and forth and staggered to the wash basin. He turned on the faucet and winced with pain as he splashed cold water on his face. The wound wasn't so bad; the bullet had skimmed his head, gashing out a red welt along his right temple. He cleaned the gash and patched it with adhesive. Then he remembered Squidy!

Luggan jerked the office door open. The white corridor was mockingly empty and the entrance to the stairwell yawned mutely. There were traces of blood on the tile floor, but it could have been his own.

Luggan closed the door and went to the window. The clock in the tower said eleven o'clock. Just one hour had passed since his doorknob had rattled. He got a drink from the bottle in his filing case and tried to think.

One thing was certain—Squidy had been in his office. The wastebasket in his safe and five hundred American dollars testified to that. But why had the killers removed Squidy's body? And why had they hauled him, Luggan, back into his office? His newspaper wrapped wastebasket was gone but he could understand that.

The private eye grimly reloaded his stub-nosed automatic. There was a way to find out—Suite 728 at the Commander Hotel ought to supply a few answers. He pulled the hat low over his eyes to conceal the bandage he had applied and went out.

The Commander was a swank midtown hotel. Luggan rode silently up in the elevator and walked down the gold and orchid corridor.

Rick pressed the bell of room 728.

The door opened slowly and Rick Luggan looked into the dark bright eyes of danger. The girl was svelte in a white evening gown that clung lovingly to the sweeping lines of a well-curved figure, and her raven black hair was combed straight back and gathered in a shining bun at the nape of her neck. Her face was a pale and lovely mask. The deep red of her lips curved in a smile that was pure invitation, and long lashes shadowed the purple of her eyes. She was the kind of a girl a man might live for—or kill for. Rick pushed past her into the white and silver living room.

"All right, baby," he said, smiling cynically, "you can start talking. I'm Rick Luggan, and I want to know all about the guy who owns this beautiful dump—and maybe you."

The girl pushed the door closed and followed Luggan into the room. Her wide hips swayed as she walked and her every movement was rhythm and grace. Rick glanced swiftly around, noting the closed door that led to other parts of the suite. A radio played softly in a corner, and the floor lamps shed dim light on the rose-colored carpets. His eyes took in the flowers in bright pots along the wide windows. The girl shoved a cigarette into a long ivory holder and sank down on the divan.

"I love to have strange men burst in on me at midnight and insult me," she said in a husky theatrical voice. "But since you're here and I'm bored, you can stay." Her eyes swept over his tall figure. "Not bad, in a crude sort of way. Luggan, you say? My name is Carla Teresi. What are you, a truck driver?"

Rick regarded her flintily. "You know my business," he said flatly. "But since you want to play—my being a truck driver wouldn't make any difference to a dame like you. Come up for air, cutie. Where is Horace Squidy's body?"

A slow flush crept into Carla's smooth cheeks.

"Straight from the shoulder, aren't you? Mr. Squidy isn't here at the moment, but if you're looking for a body"—she leaned back and stretched and gave him a languorous smile—"why don't you look under the beds?"

LUGGAN saw there were two ways to play it—his way and hers. He sat on the divan beside her and plucked the cigarette from her holder. He took a long drag from the butt and crushed it out in a tray.

"Okay," he grinned thinly. "Have it your way. What's the score, baby?"

"Score? I don't even know what game you're playing. Would you like a drink?"

"I'd love one," Rick assured her. He watched narrowly as she strolled to the bar and poured whiskey into amber glasses. He was trying to fit glamorous Carla into the life of pinched-face Horace Squidy. He shook his head as she handed him the drink.

"I don't understand it," he confessed. "What a beautiful doll like you is doing in Horace Squidy's apartment."

"Maybe I polish the furniture around here," she said flippantly and winked at him over the rim of her glass. "Here's to you, handsome."

Luggan lifted the drink and caught a whiff of chloral hydrate. He uncrossed his legs and somehow his toe tipped over the cocktail table. It crashed on the rug, and the glass top splintered.

"Sorry," he said, contritely.

Carla bent to straighten the table, and the hired cop calmly poured his drink down the back of her beautiful neck. She jumped to her feet, gasping as the ice rolled down her bare back to the floor. Luggan came off the divan, gun in hand.

"That's all I wanted to know, baby," he clipped. "Knockout drops mean you're in this, too. Let's see who else is around."

Luggan walked quickly across to the side door and jerked it open. A broad-shouldered heavyweight in a tweed suit bowled out, fists flailing. He was almost as big as Rick Luggan, but slower, much slower. He had a moon-round beefy face, with squinty little blue eyes like gimlet holes set close together over a bulbous nose. His hair and ragged mustache were light brown, and on one side of his blunt jaw was the white cicatrix of a past knife slash.

Rick slipped sideways and clipped the man behind the ear. The big man crashed onto the rose-colored carpet, arms akimbo! Rick spun on Carla. Her lovely eyes were

wide now with fright, and she shrank back toward the hall door.

"Over there," the detective ordered thinly, and waved his gun toward the windows. "And keep your beautiful mouth shut unless you want to talk to the police."

He jerked the heavyweight into a sitting position and slapped the man's beefy face, rocking it back and forth. The man groaned and opened his eyes. Rick clipped him backhand across the mouth.

"All right, wise guy," he gritted. "Your little act is over. You and the girl friend are taking me to the guy who's running this shindig, savvy?"

The man glared at Luggan with killer eyes. Rick backhanded him again, gashing his knuckles on the man's teeth. A thin line of blood trickled from the heavyweight's thick lips.

"Savvy?" Rick repeated, cocking his fist.

The man nodded and Rick pulled him to his feet.

"Where?" he snapped.

"Cliffside," Carla Teresi said from across the room. "I'll get a coat." Her shapely shoulders were trembling and she gazed at Rick with a curious mixture of admiration and despair. "It's right there in the hall closet."

They made an odd looking trio as they crossed the hotel lobby—the girl in the silver fox coat and white evening gown, the big man in the tweed suit, glum and downcast, and the tall man walking behind, hand in the pocket of his tan sport coat. They piled into a taxi at the curb, and Carla gave an address in swanky, suburban Cliffside. She leaned back on the cushions as the cab glided out on the deserted boulevard.

"I don't know anything about this," she said, glancing at Rick appraisingly. "I'm just going along for the ride."

"It may be a long one," Rick said to Carla, his gun in the heavyweight's ribs. "A guy died in the corridor outside my office and somebody's going to get my receipt for the job. You, beautiful lady, wouldn't look good strapped in the electric chair."

CARLA'S eyes opened wide. "Murder? Listen, you can let me out right here. I'm not getting mixed up in any murder!"

"Shut up!" Heavyweight snarled. "This guy is off his head. Squidy will fix it."

"Squidy better be a good fixer," Luggan said dryly, "and have a direct wire from heaven—or hell!"

The house at Cliffside clung to a dark mountainside high above the wind-swept ocean. It was just one A.M. by Rick's wrist watch when the cab pulled up in the drive and he herded his charges toward the door. He told the cabbie to wait. The walls of the massive stucco loomed like the ramparts of a Spanish grandee's castle, enclosing a sinister silence, through which their footsteps echoed hollowly as they walked down the loggia. Rick hung on the bell, keeping the gun concealed in his pocket.

The man who opened the door was a squat replica of Heavyweight. His fat jowls overhung his collar and his cheeks were a dark olive brown. Close-set black eyes regarded Carla, Heavyweight, and then Luggan. His gaze was freighted with suspicion.

"What the blazes you want?" he rumbled. He fixed his gaze on Heavyweight. "What goes on, Al?"

Al jerked a thumb at Luggan.

"This guy wants to see the boss." He leered at Carla. "She came along for the ride."

Luggan dug his elbow hard into the big man's ribs, and Al gasped in pain. His lips

drew back from yellow teeth, and he snarled like a cornered fox.

"I'll do the talking," the shamus clipped. "You—Apple-nose," he addressed the man in the doorway, "get your boss down here fast, unless you want your teeth kicked in."

Apple-nose looked the hard-faced private eye up and down, then retreated a step. For a moment, Rick thought he would close the door.

"My name's Joe," the squat man mumbled. "All right, come on in."

Rick entered last. Joe motioned the trio into a huge, beamed living room opening off the foyer, where the embers of fire still glowed in a stone hearth.

Luggan motioned Carla and Al to chairs, and put his back to the fireplace. He fixed his eyes on the entrance. He was ready for anything, fingers wrapped around the butt of the automatic in his pocket. Ready for anything, that is, except the man who walked into the living room.

It just couldn't be Horace Squidy! Luggan saw that same pinched up face and bulging forehead, egg-shaped dome, and retreating chin. But there was a difference; the detective could see it now. This man wasn't Horace Squidy, much as he looked like him.

This man was at least five years younger than Horace. He was dressed in a tan suit much like the one Horace had worn, but his hair was dark brown; Horace's fringe had been almost black. This man had bright blue eyes; Horace's eyes had been a slate gray. No, this wasn't the same man. But at a casual glance he looked enough like Horace Squidy to be a twin; he certainly was some relation.

Rick shrugged. If this man wanted him to believe he was Horace Squidy, let him go ahead. Maybe he could learn something that way. Horace Squidy was dead, shot to

death before his eyes in the corridor outside his office.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Luggan." The pinched face widened in a smile. "You didn't have to come out so late. Our business could have waited until tomorrow."

"Nothing waits till tomorrow," Luggan growled. "What kind of an act is this? First you're dead—then you're alive. A couple of things need explaining, and quick!"

Squidy stopped on the other side of a massive mahogany table. His blue eyes were impassive.

"You were paid to deliver a wastebasket to me," he said, "not to ask questions. Do you have the package with you?"

So that was why he was trying to pass himself off as Horace Squidy.

"I'm not a complete fool," Rick assured him. "The wastebasket is put away in a safe place. You get it when I get an explanation." He tipped his hat back from his temple, exposing the bandage. "Maybe you're a ghost, but there was nothing spectral about the slug that clipped me tonight. What kind of game are you playing, Squidy? I don't like being a sucker."

**J**OE moved threateningly into the room, but Squidy waved the heavy-jowled man back.

"It's simple enough," he said imperturbably. "I returned to the hotel and when you didn't bring the package, I came out here to my home for the night." He glanced at Carla. "Are you all right, dear?"

"Don't call me dear." The brunette's dark eyes sparkled angrily. "The man is talking about murder, and that's something I want no part of. I go no further than handing a nosy investigator knockout drops."

"My secretary is a little upset." Squidy

moistened his lips with a nervous tongue. "Since you are here, Mr. Luggan, we might as well arrange for delivery of the package. I'll send my men with you into the City and you can deliver the wastebasket to them."

"I don't think so," he said. His voice was deadly quiet. "You don't seem to remember the shooting in the hall. Why you aren't dead, I haven't figured out yet, but I'm not your fall guy."

Rick glanced sideways as Al's chair squeaked, but the big man was just shifting position. When he looked back at Squidy, the private detective was facing a gun. The dome-headed man's eyes were hard.

"Better be reasonable, Mr. Luggan," he clipped. "I want that package bad enough to"—he wagged the gun suggestively—"go to any lengths to get it. Al, take that weapon from his pocket."

Heavyweight rose with a leering smile, and removed the automatic from Rick's coat pocket.

"Blast you!" he snarled. "This is for the slapping around you hand out." He balled his hamlike fist and slammed Rick across the jaw. The private detective's head jerked back and he staggered against the table. Al swung again, and pile-driving pain drove into Rick's ribs. Squidy waved the gun.

"None of that," he ordered sharply. He spoke in an undertone to Joe. "All right, take him along. You stay here, Carla. And Mr. Luggan"—his voice was freighted with warning—"we want no foolishness. Just that wastebasket."

They marched outside and climbed into the cab Luggan had had wait. The driver grinned at them, thinking of the large round numbers on his meter.

Rick Luggan silently watched the pale street lights flash by as the cab buzzed up deserted Seaside Boulevard. Joe and Al

squeezed him from either side, sitting with arms folded over broad chests. Rick could feel the muzzle of his own gun poking his ribs from underneath Joe's armpit.

He stared stonily at the back of the driver's neck, thinking. He could turn the wastebasket over to the two thugs and forget the whole thing. He had his five hundred. But Rick Luggan realized he couldn't step out now. Somewhere, there was an answer to the puzzle and he had to find it. If he handed over Squidy's wastebasket, he handed over his life—for he knew instinctively that they would kill him on that instant.

"Where we going?" Joe growled. "I want to get this business over with."

"We'll go to my office." Rick leaned forward and gave the driver the Spring Avenue address. He thought he felt the squat gorilla's shoulder tremble, but maybe it was the cab jolting.

"Why your office?" Joe's heavy jowls sank. "How come your office is open at two A.M.?"

Rick smiled thinly. "Maybe you'd rather go to a police station." His voice was cold, hard. "You don't like my office, do you, Apple-nose? It's open—it's always open for business like ours."

Joe turned threateningly in the seat.

"Don't call me Apple-nose—" he began.

"Shut up," Al ordered. Joe's big companion dug the gun into Luggan's side. "You too, smart guy."

The cab pulled up in front of the two story brownstone building housing the detective's office, and Al stepped down to the curb, followed by the private eye. As his feet hit the sidewalk, Luggan whirled and whipped the cab door closed in Joe's face. There was a fleeting moment of surprise in Al's beefy face and he swung his gun around. Luggan caught the blow on an arm. He gritted his teeth and drove

his fist hard into Heavyweight's bruised mouth. Al grunted and sat down on the sidewalk. The detective sped across to the shelter of the building foyer. He ran up the marble steps three at a time and took the corridor in long strides to his office. Inside he got a spare gun from his desk and went to the window. The cab was speeding away, in the direction of the Commander Hotel.

**R**ICK LUGGAN sighed and wiped the sweat from his tanned forehead. He hadn't thought they'd risk following him into the office, to face an almost certain gun.

Luggan got the wastebasket from his safe and stood it on his desk. He inspected the brown rattan container from every angle, even cut into the material to locate any hidden article, but there was nothing. He examined the bottom to see if it was false, but it was just a thin sheet of metal. The design on the basket claimed his attention. A string of bright colored flower pots containing Holland tulips circled the upper rim of the basket. Below these, around the base, Rick saw a painted seascape, with white sailboats climbing blue waves. He frowned and rubbed his head. Flower pots? The sea? That didn't ring any bells.

The wound in Luggan's forehead began to throb. He went to the filing case for his bottle, found it empty and crossed to the closet for a fresh bottle. The detective jerked the light switch upward, and froze in his tracks. Slumped in a corner of the closet, under the shelves, his jaw gaping horribly and the front of his camel's hair coat soaked with dried blood, was a pinched-face man. It was Horace Squidy!

For the second time that night, Rick Luggan's senses reeled and his mind refused to believe his eyes. But his



amazement was shortlived. He stepped briskly into the closet and bent over the body. The coat was torn where killer slugs had ripped into the man's chest. Luggan felt the hands, and found them stiff. Four and a half hours, he thought, was time enough for rigor mortis to set in. Rick's heart pounded as he switched out the light and closed the closet door. Now things began to make sense—the dead didn't wake. He glanced at the wastebasket, and somewhere in his mind a single bell tolled. He scooped up the basket and raced for the door.

There might still be time!

It seemed to take forever for the cab to cross town. Every red light went against them as Luggan sat tensely on the edge of the rear seat urging the driver on. Slow moving milk trucks got in the way, and at a railroad crossing the cab waited interminably for a freight to pass. The driver wanted to talk, to know why Rick was in such a hurry, and tried to tell him about his kid's new tricycle. The shamus finally tossed the man a ten dollar bill and angrily ordered him to shut up.

A single cluster of lights burned inside the Commander Hotel lobby as Luggan plunged through the revolving doors and walked briskly up to the desk clerk. He flashed his state shield briefly.

"Detective." He ripped the word at the astonished bald-headed clerk. "Get Sergeant Clancy on the phone at the Twelfth Precinct Station. Tell him to get the Homicide Squad rolling to Suite 728—and give me a pass key."

The clerk paled and nodded. He handed Luggan the key, and the private eye raced for the elevators.

"After you let me out at the seventh floor, take this elevator down and keep it down until the police come," Luggan told the boy. "And if you hear any shooting, find a place to hide."

The gold and orchid corridor was deserted. Rick bent in front of 728, fitted the key in the lock and swung the door open gently. He stepped inside and set the wastebasket down. Across the room Carla Teresi looked up from a magazine. Her dark eyes widened with surprise.

"You again!" she gasped. "Don't you have a home?"

Luggan laid a finger across his lips. His feet made no sound on the thick rose-colored rug as he crossed to her side.

"Where's your boss?" he asked softly.

She nodded silently at the connecting door. Her words were a fierce whisper.

"Listen—I don't have anything to do with murder."

The detective quieted her with a gesture. "I know. How about the mugs—they in there, too?"

She nodded again. "Came in ten minutes ago, pretty excited."

"They're not nearly as excited as they will be," Rick grinned thinly, "when the State shoots the juice to them. Get out into the corridor, baby. The cops are on the way."

Carla rose and left the room. Luggan crossed swiftly to the flower pots arranged along the window, and sat them on the floor. His deft fingers pried at the broad sill, and the board came loose easily. Luggan reached a long arm into the opening and his hand came out with a long metal box. He smiled in quick satisfaction. The wastebasket hadn't lied. Sea under flower pots. Quickly he opened the box and scanned the papers it contained. His smile broadened.

HE WAS putting the sill back as the connecting door opened.

"Carla," a rasping voice said, "the boss wants you."

Luggan reached for his gun.

"Hello, Killer," Rick clipped, as Joe's

squat figure appeared in the doorway. "Come on out—with your hands up."

Joe's close-set eyes darted to the window. He reached for his hip and crowded back. The detective's automatic leaped in his hand, and through the blue gunsmoke he saw Joe stumble forward to his knees. Swiftly Rick circled the divan, keeping his gun trained on the doorway, and through the narrow opening he saw Al's heavyweight figure lunging for cover. Luggan fired again, and his bullet tore into a mirror, filling the suite with the tinkle of broken glass.

In the silence following his shot, the eye spoke again.

"The game's over, Harold Squidy. I've found your uncle's will and his letter telling his fear of you. You'll never have that money now, Harold. Your uncle hid the will right here in your cousin's suite, and gave him the wastebasket when he died. You knew that wastebasket contained a clue to the location of the will. Come out alive, cousin killer, if you want to—otherwise, you come out dead!"

Al's big frame loomed suddenly in the doorway, gun spouting leaden death. The big man rushed the divan, and Luggan had time for only one shot. The heavyweight crashed over a table and his thick arms wrapped themselves around the detective's chest. Tearing pain ran into Luggan's lungs as the big man's arms tightened like hot steel bands. Red spots danced before the private dick's eyes, and he caught a

fleeting glimpse of something white overhead. A vase came crashing down.

Al's grip relaxed and the cop slipped out from beneath the killer's limp body. Carla stood over him, red lips compressed grimly, in her hands the broken remnants of the vase.

"Thanks, Baby," Rick grinned quickly. "That makes us even."

He walked to the doorway and into the bedroom. Harold Squidy's round-shouldered figure cowered in a corner behind the bed. Rick jerked the man to his feet and led him out into the living room. He shoved the dome-headed man into a chair.

"Cousins," he said to Carla. "Only this one was left out of his uncle's will. Too blasted mean. For a while he had me buffaloed. I knew all the time he wasn't Horace, but couldn't quite make out the set-up. Now about those knock-out drops, Baby—"

"He told me you were a snoop and he wanted to turn you over to the police." Carla lit a cigarette nervously. Her smooth cheeks were warm with color and her deep red lips glowed invitingly. "I didn't know any different," she added. "Not for a while."

Rick smiled and his eyes slid over the sweeping curves of her graceful figure. Through the window the rising wail of a siren tore the night.

"Okay, Baby, after we explain to the cops, we'll have plenty of time for everything."