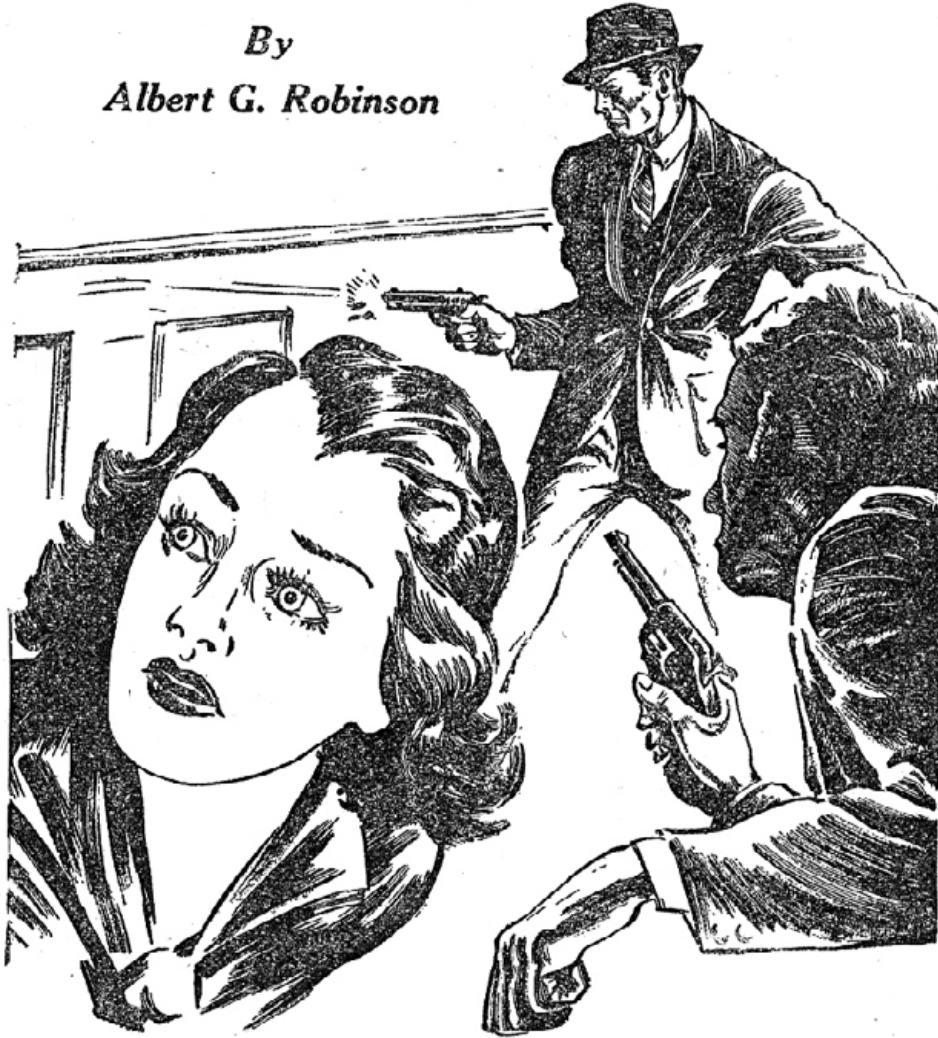


Kayo on Murder

By
Albert G. Robinson



Shane Peters, ex-heavyweight champ, had to pull a last-round murder kayo. For his prizefight client was being groomed by the Big Timekeeper as the feature attraction in a Death House semi-final.

“EIGHT-nine-ten.” The referee raised “Texas” Kane’s hand and announced him the winner in the fifth round by a knockout. He added that as winner, he had gained the right to meet the champion in a fifteen-round match soon to be scheduled.

Shane Peters, sitting in a ringside seat, noted with surprise that Neely Adams,

Texas Kane’s manager, did not enter the ring to share the applause with his fighter, but stood swaying at the ringside, looking about with nervous, drunken apprehension. Shane, following the man’s gaze, picked out several well-known gamblers who played the boxing game.

Looking at their sullen and impassive features, he felt a nervous unrest stir

within him. Maybe it had been the right move after all to allow Texas Kane's sister Eileen to persuade him to accompany her to the fights, even though he had told her he could see no reason for her fear. He turned away from the ring to speak to her.

"You see," he said, indicating the ring, "there was no trouble in the fight or no need of me. Your brother seems to be able to take care of himself without any help."

Eileen Kane, beautiful even in the harsh glare of the ring lights, regarded him for a moment as if trying to decide whether this obvious remark was merely stupid or concealed some deeper thought.

"The fight!" she said scornfully. "Did you think I was afraid of what that rubber-legged, glass-chinned bum might do to Tex? Or have so many years of poring over law books erased your knowledge of fighters and fighting? You were the heavyweight champion yourself once, weren't you, Mr. Peters?"

Shane felt his ears grow red.

"It was rather a stupid remark," he acknowledged, "but what else have I to say? You come to my office with a story of your brother hitting his manager, who had had one too many, and from that expect me to uncover some startling mystery and solve it on the instant."

Eileen relented. "Perhaps I was imagining too much," she said, "but I really was worried. I couldn't help think there was something wrong when I heard they were betting four to one against Tex."

SHANE let out a slow, amazed whistle. Then he leaned over and tapped the shoulder of the man who sat in front of him. The reporter swiveled around with annoyance, but recognizing Peters, his expression changed.

"Oh, hello, champ," he said. "Didn't know you took in the fights any more. What can I do you for?"

"What were the odds on that last fight?" asked Shane. "I mean betting odds, not newspaper odds."

"Something funny about that," replied the newspaper man. "They were four to one against Kane. There's been some talk of a fix. But say, champ, just what capacity you in tonight? Ex-champ, lawyer, or could it be private detective?"

Shane laughed. "You know me. Just a sports lover, pure and simple."

"Now ain't that just dandy? Well, remember me when you're ready to break the case."

Shane turned back to the girl. "Well," he said, "what do we do now? Go to Tex's dressing room, stay and see Joe Louis, or take in a cafe or two?"

"Tex doesn't like visitors in his room after a fight," replied Eileen, "so that's out. And I don't think I'd care to be seen in a night club with a private detective. It might give people ideas. So that leaves Joe Louis."

"But I'm a lawyer, not a detective," protested Shane.

"That's not the way I heard it," said Eileen.

Shane shrugged and relaxed in his seat. An announcer climbed into the ring and a seemingly endless string of ex-champions began to make their bows from the ring. The sight brought back to Shane the memory of his last fight as heavy weight champion. And of his victory and of a left hand so badly smashed that his ring career was over.

And how, with a good-sized bank account as a cushion, he had taken up the study of law. Once past his bar exams, he had offered his services as lawyer and private detective virtually free to those who were deserving but could not afford the usual fees.

The announcer's calling his name brought Shane Peters back to the present

and he shook his head in refusal to the invitation to take a bow. A few minutes later the familiar figure of the champion climbed into the ring amid loud applause, and a second later the challenger was greeted with less applause but with a great deal of advice. Introductions over and referee's instructions given, the house lights went off, the bell rang, and the fight was on.

The challenger moved out, eyes set, face white and chalky. He feinted once, then threw a desperate right that brushed the negro's jaw. The champion lowered his head a little, shuffled forward a half-step and started a careless left hook. It might have been careless when it started but when it landed, it ended the fight. The left and right that followed were the actual knockout blows, but the first one was what counted.

Shane didn't bother to wait for the referee's count. He rose and helped the girl with her coat. He tucked his own under his arm, and they started to push their way up the aisle. It was a good ten minutes before they reached the exit gate.

At the doorway a policeman stood searching the crowd with his eyes and, as they came past, stopped them.

"Miss Kane?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm Miss Kane," she managed to answer. "What do you want?"

"Lieutenant Dunnigan wants to see you, lady," he answered. "Come along with me." Taking her arm, he shouldered a path back down the aisle toward the ring.

"What's the matter?" the girl gasped.

"Little matter of murder, miss," replied the officer over his shoulder. "Somebody stuck a knife into Neely Adams, and him dead drunk. And they wasn't nobody in the room 'cepting your brother."

EILEEN staggered and would have fallen but for Shane's supporting arm.

In this manner, they followed the policeman back to the ring, along one side of it, and then up one of the aisles that fanned out from its four corners. At the end of the aisle, the main arena was cut off from the dressing rooms by a partition that ran behind the last row of seats.

At the partition the policeman turned abruptly to the right down a corridor, one side of which was formed by the partition and the other by the front wall of two dressing rooms. Two doors opened on the corridor, and at the first of these a policeman stood on guard. He stepped aside to let the girl past but halted Shane. Hearing his protest, the girl stopped and turned back.

"Mr. Peters is my lawyer," she said. "I won't go in without him." Shane smiled to himself at her use of the word lawyer and strode past the cop.

In the room were ten people, split up into three groups. Shane looked them over, recognizing most of them.

In the far right-hand corner by the shower stall was Texas Kane, seated on a bench and flanked by two husky policemen. Texas was barefooted and wore only a pair of trousers.

In the same group was "Peanuts" Santini, the gambler who got his name not alone for his pint size but from his habit of continuously chewing peanuts which he fished from his side coat pocket.

In the near right-hand corner were two men. Shane regarded them with dislike. "Slats" McGovern, the third-rater Tex Kane had knocked out that night. Benno Margriff, racketeer and McGovern's manager. Of the two, perhaps only Slats McGovern deserved to be out of jail, for he was just a stooge for Margriff.

To the left, there was a group around the rubbing table. Nearest was a police photographer, setting up his tripod. Behind him hulked Lieutenant Dunnigan, easily

recognizable in back view from his burly shoulders and thick, red neck. Then there was the fingerprint expert and the police doctor.

Between the vertical columns of their backs, Shane could make out the body of a man lying face downward on the rubbing table, a slowly darkening red stain spreading from his chest onto the white of the table. Neely Adams, Shane thought. Drunk and frightened an hour ago, now dead.

Lieutenant Dunnigan swung around from the table, his face for all its heavy fat, hard and belligerent.

"Miss Kane?" he piped in a high voice that was in curious contrast to his large frame. "Looks like your brother's in a tough spot." His glance shifted to Shane and he scowled.

"Mr. Peters of the Peters free law clinic, eh?" he squeaked with exaggerated politeness. "Mr. Peters, the bright young lawyer. Mr. Peters, the keyhole detective. Mr. Peters, the ex-champ who leads with his right. Well, Mr. Peters, we don't need you here, so on your way."

Shane grinned and rubbed the bones of his left hand with his famous right.

"Leading with your right, lieutenant," he answered smiling, "is all right when you connect. Seems to me it connected in the Underwood case. Remember, Dunnigan? And I don't think I'll be on my way. I'm Miss Kane's lawyer."

"Lawyer, eh?" Dunnigan sniffed. "Say, not even Darrow could have gotten Kane out of this rap. We got an open and shut case against him. Why, we even got—but that can wait. Now, Miss Kane, have you noticed any hard feelings between your brother and Adams lately?"

"Just a minute," put in Shane quickly. "Eileen, you don't have to answer the lieutenant's questions unless you want to. And you certainly shouldn't answer any

questions until the lieutenant tells you just what has happened. How about it, Dunnigan?"

The lieutenant threw Shane an impatient glance, then shrugged, and began an explanation.

"It's like this, Miss Kane," he said. "The harness bull on duty at the end of this corridor during the fight says Adams and Kane came back here after the fight. They were having a knockdown, drag-out argument. He let them into their dressing room and while he was doing so, Margriff and McGovern came down the corridor.

"He went down and let them in and then came back to the end of the passageway. After that there was no one in the aisle. When Peanuts Santini came up the aisle from the ring, he let him pass. That was just after the knockout in the main bout.

"In about fifteen seconds, according to this harness bull, Peanuts came running back, squealing that someone had stuck a knife into Adams. The policeman investigated immediately and sure enough, there was Adams, lying half on and half off the rubbing table, a big knife in his back, and plenty dead. There was nobody in the room except your brother, who was standing in the shower stall just as though he didn't know there was a dead man in the same room.

"Well, I was at the ring and I got here right away. Margriff and McGovern testified that neither of them left their room until I sent for them. Your brother claims he didn't kill Adams, but he admits he didn't hear anyone come in and couldn't see anything from the shower stall. His story is that after he and Adams got back to the room, Adams, who was drunk, passed out on the rubbing table.

"He just left him there, cut the tape off his hands with his knife, and went into the shower. He stayed there until he heard

Peanuts Santini let out a yell. I'd like to believe his story but the facts don't permit it. No one else could have killed Adams. I'm afraid I'll have to arrest him for murder."

"But you can't," cried Eileen. "Tex wouldn't seriously harm anyone. Why, when he was as mad as he could be this afternoon, he just knocked Neely down and then walked off."

SHANE groaned, and Lieutenant Dunnigan, standing beside him, shook his head sadly. "I guess that settles it," he said. "Kane and Adams were fighting this afternoon and tonight they fight some more. Only this time Kane has a knife handy and he sticks it into Adams."

"What about fingerprints?" asked Shane, but it was without much hope.

"Just got a check on that, Peters," replied Dunnigan. "A full set of prints running down the handle of the knife on the side towards the shoulders. And even a quick check proves without doubt that they're Kane's."

"You say the prints were on the flat side of the handle towards the shoulders?" Shane asked.

"That's right," replied Dunnigan. "According to the doctor, the blade of the knife went in parallel to Adams' belt: between the ribs on the inner border of the scapula. The prints were on the side of the handle away from the belt."

"What about Peanuts Santini?" inquired Shane. "What did he want?"

"That's another angle that looks bad for Kane," answered Dunnigan. "Peanuts says that Adams had bet five thousand dollars on the fight, and to prove his ability to pay if he lost, actually showed Peanuts the cash just before the fight. Well, Adams lost and Peanuts came to collect. But when we searched Adams' body, the five thousand was missing."

"Then someone else must have come into the room, killed Adams, and taken the money," said Shane with relief.

"That's what I figured at first," piped Dunnigan. "But we found the missing money hidden in the tip of Kane's shoe. It just adds robbery to Kane's other motive of a grudge against Adams. I'm afraid it's hopeless, Peters."

"Take a look at the facts. We have witnesses to prove there was bad feelings between Adams and Kane; we have witnesses to prove that no one was on the scene but Kane when the crime was committed. The murder weapon was Kane's own knife and has his fingerprints on it. And finally we find five thousand dollars of Adams' money in Kane's shoe. That's enough for me, and it'll be enough for the D. A. and the jury."

"Maybe, lieutenant, maybe," said Shane Peters. "But come along, Eileen. We'll be going home."

Outside the arena, Shane bundled the girl into a cab. They rode in silence and in a few minutes arrived at the house whose address Eileen had given. Inside, Eileen, with a brave display of courage, offered to make coffee and Shane assented.

Once they were seated, he brought up the subject of the quarrel that occurred in the room that afternoon. "I was in the kitchen," said Eileen wearily, "when I heard a crash. I ran out into this room and found Tex standing in the center of the room, fists clenched, staring down at Neely. Neely was lying in the corner where Tex's blow had sent him, wiping the blood from his mouth."

"Which corner?" asked Shane.

"Over there," replied Eileen, pointing. "When Tex noticed me, he went over and helped Neely to his feet. Then they both went out of the house without explanation. I was too surprised to ask any questions."

Shane got to his feet and went over to

the corner Eileen had indicated, as if trying to visualize the scene. Noticing a light-colored object lying half under a chair, he stooped and picked it up. It was a bank book bearing the name of Nielson Adams. Flipping it open, Shane whistled softly.

"What is it?" inquired Eileen.

"According to this," answered Shane, "Adams drew out ten thousand dollars this morning, yet there was only five found in your brother's shoe. And no more anywhere in the dressing room."

He snatched up his hat and was halfway through the door before Eileen's voice caught up with him.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm going to look for that other five thousand," replied Shane Peters and closed the door behind him. He hailed a cruising cab, rode to police headquarters and strode into Lieutenant Dunnigan's office.

"Nice to see you again, Dunnigan," said Shane. "But I really came to see Tex Kane. And in a hurry."

"Seeing that you're his lawyer," Dunnigan fluted, "I don't guess I got any objection to that. But what's the point to it?"

"This," said Shane, and he drew the bank book from his pocket and tossed it on the desk.

THE lieutenant picked it up and thumbed through it. "I can't see that this has any bearing on the case," he said finally. "If Adams drew ten thousand this morning, so what? He spent five and Kane murdered him for the rest."

"You're probably right," Shane said agreeably, "but I'd just like to see what Kane has to say about it."

"You're wasting your time, Peters, but I don't suppose time means anything to a guy with a million in the bank." He pushed a button and directed the sergeant who

appeared to take Peters to Texas Kane's cell. In the cell Shane spoke quickly.

"Tex, I'll make a bargain with you. If you give me the straight answers to a few questions, I'll have you out of here by tomorrow noon."

Texas Kane stared at him doubtfully. "Shoot."

"Okay. How much did Adams draw out of the bank this morning?"

"All we had. Ten thousand."

"What for?"

"He bet it on McGovern."

"On McGovern?"

"Yeah. Adams gets the fight with McGovern by agreeing with Margriff that I'm to take a dive. I refuse, and he tells me I can't. Says he's going to put all our dough on Margriff's bum. He does and I knock him down and tell him that's what I'm going to do to McGovern, dough or no dough."

"Then we go down to the gym and pretty soon he says he's going over to see Margriff. He doesn't get back 'til just before the fight, and when he does, he's drunk and don't make sense. He won't say nothing about what Margriff had to say. Then my fight goes on, and you know what happened after that."

"You say he went over to see Margriff," said Shane. "Where?"

"Margriff's got a room over at the Hotel Traynor. I guess he went there."

"The Hotel Traynor?"

"Yeah. You been in the fight game yourself, champ, and you ought to know the mob that hangs out there."

"I know," said Shane grimly, "and I think I'll pay a call on them tonight."

"Better not, champ. Getting yourself shot ain't gonna get me out of here. Margriff carries a gun."

"Thanks for the tip. See you tomorrow, Tex."

"Maybe, maybe. But thanks anyway,

champ, and keep an eye on Eileen for me, will you? This is going to be tough on her."

"Right."

Outside police headquarters, Shane took a cab downtown instead of uptown to the Traynor. He got off at a little bar on Bleecker Street and, after a few inquiries, located Peanuts Santini. He was sitting at a table alone, nursing a large glass of beer.

Shane ordered himself one and took it over to Santini's table. Peanuts looked up as he approached and waved him to a chair.

"Sit down, champ," he invited. "What brings you down to this neighborhood?"

"Just to get a beer," said Shane, "and do a little wondering."

"Wondering about what?" asked Santini, digging in his pocket for a handful of peanuts.

"Wondering who was betting on who in that Kane-McGovern fight and why."

Peanuts grimaced.

"Margriff was betting on Kane, if that's what you want to know. He nicked me for twenty grand. Five G's at one to four. Then Adams gets knocked off and I don't collect the five grand he had on McGovern. What a night!"

Shane took a long pull on his beer and a thought struck him.

"Was Margriff in the money?" he asked.

"That's a funny thing," replied Peanuts. "He's been putting the bite on everyone for months. But when I asked to see the color of his money, he had it. McGovern had five thousand saved up, though, and maybe Margriff put a touch on him."

"That's the angle I've been looking for," said Shane. "Now if you'll let me have twenty thousand in cash until tomorrow, I'll be getting on."

"Twenty thousand! Say, champ, are

you kidding?"

"Never more serious, Peanuts. I need it for a little sleight-of-hand stunt tonight."

"Twenty G's don't sound so slight to me, champ, but I ain't forgetting the favors you done me. Let's get out of this joint and I'll see what I can do."

HALF an hour later Shane Peters was riding uptown with twenty thousand dollars in cash in his coat pocket. It was a quarter to three by the clock in the Hotel Traynor lobby when he walked up to the seedy-looking desk clerk. The place was deserted.

"What's Margriff's room number, Mac?" he asked.

"Eleven seventy-one," the clerk mumbled sleepily, "but he didn't say nothing about expecting anyone."

"I'm Shane Peters," said Shane. "We've got a little deal on." Recognition flared in the clerk's eyes and he tried to look knowing.

"Sure, champ," he said hastily. "Go right up. Elevator's on the left."

Getting out of the elevator, Shane located 1171 at the end of the corridor. Through the door he could hear the murmur of voices and the clink of glasses. He eased the .38 Colt in his shoulder holster to make sure it was set for quick use and tapped gently on the door. The murmur of voices ceased.

"Who is it?" a voice asked.

Shane screwed up his mouth and essayed a pretty fair imitation of the little Italian gambler's voice. "Peanuts Santini," he replied.

There was a consultation and then the door opened a crack.

Before he could be recognized, Shane put his one hundred and ninety pounds against the door. Driving it open, he stepped into the room. Surprised by the sudden push, Slat McGovern, who had

opened the door, stumbled and fell over a chair.

Directly facing Shane, Margriff rose slowly and smoothly from his chair, his small, beady eyes glittering. Shane closed the door behind him and stepped forward smiling.

"Celebrating, boys?" he asked, looking around. "Sit down, Margriff. No use being formal."

"Leading with your right again, eh, Peters?" snarled Margriff, and jerked his head over his shoulder towards McGovern. "Slat, throw this shyster lawyer out of here."

"Throw him out yourself, Margriff," grunted McGovern. "You ain't never been hit by that there shyster lawyer."

"Still remember that third round in Chicago?" grinned Shane. "Seems you've got a better memory than Margriff. I'd be willing to bet that he doesn't even remember that twenty thousand dollars he collected from Peanuts Santini just a few hours ago."

Shane, alert, saw the cautious movement of Margriff's hand toward his hip, and with a sure, practiced ease, produced his .38 from beneath his right armpit. Margriff froze.

"Is that polite, Margriff?" asked Shane reproachfully. "Just when I want to tell McGovern about your good luck, you try to pull a gun."

"What do you mean, good luck," said McGovern bitterly. "He ain't even got good management. Tells me I'm a sure thing to win tonight and borrows five grand from me to bet with. And what happens? I get knocked out and on top of that, don't get my five G's back. Call that luck?"

"Shut up, McGovern," snapped Margriff. "I'm still managing this outfit and I'll do the talking."

"You're going to have to do a lot of

talking, Margriff," put in Shane, "to explain how you put Slat's money on Kane, collected twenty thousand dollars, and then forgot to tell him about it."

"That's a lie!" shouted Margriff. "I put that money on Slat and lost it. I never saw any part of twenty thousand."

"Is that so?" inquired Shane in a dangerously quiet voice. He stepped close to Margriff, waving his gun under the latter's nose. The eyes of the two men followed the deadly black barrel with fascination.

As they did so, Shane's right hand, moving incredibly swiftly, appeared to produce a large roll of bills from Margriff's coat pocket. Then Shane stepped back and tossed the roll to McGovern.

"Count it, McGovern," said Shane, "and figure out what happened to your five thousand Margriff said he lost."

"It's a frame!" yelled Margriff, but McGovern was too busy counting the money to notice him. In a minute he was finished.

"Twenty grand!" declared Slat McGovern. "The dirty double-crossing rat!" He straightened up to face Margriff, his face working dangerously.

"So you were going to do me out of twenty thousand bucks, were you?" he mouthed, and drove a blow to Margriff's chin that knocked him halfway across the room.

At that moment the door behind Shane opened and he turned to face it, gun poised. His face dropped in astonishment as Eileen Kane walked in. As she did, her gaze went past him and she screamed.

In a flash Shane realized his mistake and whirled, and in the same moment a gun exploded behind him. The heavy slug tore through his left arm and sent his gun clattering to the floor.

ACROSS the room Margriff rose from the floor where McGovern's blow had sent him, his gun smoking and steady in his hand. Slat McGovern backed away from the menace of his gun. Margriff, his eyes on Shane, advanced and picked up the roll of bills from the table and slid them in his pocket.

"Get over against the wall," he ordered, his voice harsh. "All of you."

Shane measured the chances for a sudden leap, but even without the handicap of a useless left arm, it was hopeless. With a shrug that sent the pain driving down his injured arm, he walked to the wall. Margriff watched him narrowly, then backed toward the door.

"Maybe McGovern fell for your kid magician stunt, shyster," he said, "but that little trick is going to cost you twenty grand. And your twenty plus the twenty I got from Santini will keep me for quite a time after I blow this burg. As for you, sister, thanks for opening the door when you did."

His eyes swung to McGovern, and his lips curled in a sneer. "So long, sucker, and thanks for the five grand. Think of me when you get back to the flophouse where I found you."

He laughed mirthlessly and turned to go out the door. As he did so, the huge form of Lieutenant Dunnigan materialized out of the darkness of the hall and enveloped him. Before Margriff knew what had happened, he was disarmed and helpless, his wrists braceleted. With a rough shove, Dunnigan whirled him back into the room, then followed him across the threshold.

Shane looked at him wanly. "This seems to be a night for timely entrances," he said.

Lieutenant Dunnigan looked at the blood dripping from Shane's left arm;

"I guess it is," he said. "But if Miss Kane hadn't decided that you were in danger, I wouldn't have made that timely entrance. When she came down to the station for a talk with her brother and then dashed off in a wild hurry, I decided to follow her. But what's all the shooting about?"

"Maybe McGovern can give you the answer," replied Shane. "I doubt if he feels like giving Margriff an alibi any longer."

"Hell, no!" said Slat McGovern. "I wasn't going to say nothing about Margriff's leaving the dressing room after the fight to go see Adams, because he promised to get my five thousand back. But that dirty rat was planning to double-cross me all the time and was going to blow town with my twenty G's."

"Not to mention my twenty," said Shane.

"You mean—" began Dunnigan.

"Yes," Shane said wearily. His arm was beginning to hurt badly. "Margriff sneaked down the corridor, found Adams passed out on the rubbing table and Kane in the showers. Kane's knife was lying right there so he stuck it into Adams' back.

"Going through Adams' pockets, he found ten thousand dollars. Figuring that putting the rap on Kane was worth five grand to him, he put five in Kane's shoe and sneaked back down the corridor."

"But the harness bull said he saw no one in the corridor," squeaked Dunnigan.

"Ever see an Irish cop at a fight that had eyes for anything else but what was going on in the ring?" asked Shane. "Well, this one was no exception. When he described to me how Louis knocked his man out with two lefts and a right, I knew he hadn't been watching the corridor too closely."

"But how about the fingerprints?" Dunnigan protested.

“Simple,” said Shane. “Margriff merely balanced the blade of the knife with one hand and drove it in with a hard shove on the butt with the other. The fact that the fingerprints were on the top side of the knife handle should have told you that the knife couldn’t have been gripped in the ordinary fashion and driven in with a single-handed blow.”

“Why would Margriff want to kill Adams as you say he did?” piped Dunnigan.

“He was hard up for money,” replied Shane. “And when Adams told him in the afternoon that Kane wasn’t going to take a dive, he knew McGovern didn’t have a chance. So, without saying anything to McGovern, he put the money on Kane.

“Nobody knew he hadn’t put it on McGovern, so he figured that he’d keep

the twenty grand he won for himself. But Adams was the only one who might have let out the fact that he knew McGovern wasn’t going to win. So when he saw his chance to kill Adams and frame Texas Kane, he took it.”

“How did you figure all this out?” asked Eileen.

“I didn’t,” said Shane with a smile. “I just led with my right.”

Then, feeling suddenly weak from the pain and the tension, he sat down abruptly. Eileen Kane gave a little cry and came over beside him.

“Leading with your right is okay with me,” she said softly, “when the man that’s doing it is Shane Peters.”

By the doorway Lieutenant Dunnigan snorted loudly.

“Just dumb luck,” he stated.