

# **Six Deadly Dames**

Frederick Nebel



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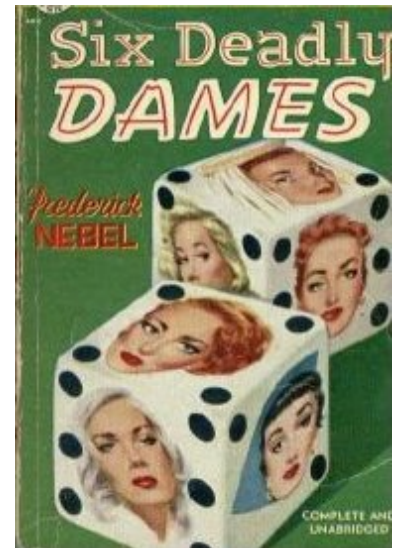
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### Frederick Nebel

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## The Red-Hots

THE TAXI sloped and skidded through brittle slush and its right front wheel grated against the curb as squealing four-wheel brakes dragged it to a stop. Grimy water splashed the sidewalk.

Donahue, lurching in the darkened back, said, "Never mind the trimmings, brother," and then pushed open the door.

The driver said, "These lousy streets," with a grievance, while reaching out a hand to take a dollar bill Donahue thrust through the connecting window. When the driver returned fifty cents Donahue gave him a dime, stepped out into the freezing slush and banged the door.

Donahue climbed the narrow stone steps of the gray-faced house in Waverly Place. The glass vestibule door was open, but the door behind it was locked. Beside this door was a white button which Donahue pressed.

Presently a figure materialized behind the white-curtained glass door, and then the door opened and a small, plain-looking man of middle years said, "Yes, sir?" inquiringly.

Donahue said, "I'd like to see Mr. Crosby."

The man opened the door wide and said, "He's on the top floor in the studio apartment—number fifty-two." "Thanks," said Donahue.

He went halfway down the hall and climbed three staircases. Number fifty-two was at the back of the hall, and there was a streak of light between door and threshold.

He knocked and heard some movement inside. But it was fully a minute before the key turned in the lock. Then the door opened and a small youngish thin man, neatly dressed in blue serge, looked at him.

Donahue asked, "Mr. Crosby?"

The man smiled with white agreeable teeth and said, "No, he's not in."

Donahue looked at his strap-watch. "He was to be. It's eight-thirty. We had a date for eight-thirty. I'll park."

He walked in without waiting to be asked, took off his brown Borsalino. His black hair was thick and had many shining undulations. His face was long, lean, tawny-brown and his eyes were nut-brown beneath wiry black brows. He threw his hat on a wide divan and opened his raglan coat.

The small neat young man closed the door, and still wearing his agreeable smile, said cheerfully, "Have a seat. Crosby ought to be back if you say you have a date with him. ... I didn't get the name?"

"I'm Donahue. My boss sent me down here. Crosby called up late this afternoon and asked to send a man down. ... You a friend of Crosby's?"

"We room together."

Donahue dropped into a huge leather easy chair beside a fireplace in which red embers glowed. He snapped a match on his thumb-nail— and lit a cigarette. Throwing the match into the fireplace, he said offhand, "What's worrying Crosby?"

The neat young man was standing with his back to the door eyeing Donahue quizzically. "Was something worrying him?"

Donahue looked up sharply. "Enough to want a private dick."

"Oh ... I see." The neat young man put his hands on his hips. "He just came back from Paris, you know. We haven't seen much of each other. But he looked worried. I didn't know. Didn't he say anything over the telephone?"

"No. He just said send a dick down."

"Then he must be worried!" The neat young man left the door, crossed to the bathroom, came out a minute later and said, "He should be back any minute. He went out to get a bite to eat. I've a date. Hope you don't mind waiting alone."

"Not at all."

The neat young man put on a blue ulster and a derby and pulled on yellow gloves. "Make yourself at home. Cigs in the box there, and some cigars, I think. Tell Crosby I'll be back late."

"Okey."

The man said, "Well, good-night, Mr. Donahue," smiled agreeably, opened the door and went out.

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Donahue swung the chair around to face the fire and stuck his feet on a split log. When he finished the cigarette he opened the humidor on the low brass Moorish coffee table and helped himself to a cigar. He lighted it complacently.

The bronze clock on the mantel said nine-thirty when he tossed the cigar butt into the grate and stood up with an impatient grunt.

A soft knock on the door made him turn abruptly and look at it. Then he crossed to the door, opened it and stood looking down at the face of an incredibly beautiful girl. She was smiling, but a glimmer of surprise showed through her smile.

When she said nothing, Donahue said, "Yes? Do you want to see Mr. Crosby?"

She nodded. "Ye-es."

"He's not in but I'm waiting, too, so you may as well join me. . . though"——as she walked in——"I was just on the point of leaving."

His eyes slanted down at her, appraised her with satisfaction, and he was closing the door when she turned around and stood with her back to the fireplace. She wore a mole coat and a dark snug cloche hat. She was very small, with small white teeth, brown big eyes and olive satin skin, and there was a distinct odor of liquid-heavy Shalimar perfume.

Donahue smiled, showing long narrow teeth. His dark eyes glittered, and he bowed, saying, "You might as well sit down."

"I'll get warm first," she said, and shivered, adding, "Miserable weather!"

He said brightly, "Yes, rotten out. It's been comfortable by the fire. Crosby should have been in long ago. We had a date. Guy lives with him asked me to wait and then breezed ... he had a date."

She said, "Oh, yes?" in a far-away voice, and threw a series of veiled looks around the room.

"You know Crosby well?" Donahue asked bluntly.

"Rather well. He telephoned me he was back from Europe. I just dropped in ... wasn't certain of finding him. Since you have a date with him perhaps I'd better go."

"Nonsense! Hang around."

She sighed. "Mine is not important . . . merely a hello call. Did his friend say when Mr. Crosby'd come back?"

"No. No, he didn't. He just said he figured he'd be back if we had a date. He was a nice agreeable little guy." Her eyes clouded and her lips tightened for the briefest of moments. Then she said, "Well . . . I'll be going. I have an appointment uptown at ten."

He said in a disappointed voice, "Well, if you must . . ." and moved with her to the door. "I'll tell him you called?"

"If you will. He'll know me . . . Leone Tenquist's the name."

Donahue said he would tell Crosby, and the woman went out leaving a faint smile and a breath of Shalimar perfume.

When the room was quiet again, the ticking of the bronze clock audible, Donahue muttered, "Don't know what's keeping that guy," and started pacing up and down irritably. Ten minutes of this and he began looking around for a telephone. There was none in the living-room. He lit a match and prowled into the adjoining room. It was large and bare, with a skylight, and a dais and the paraphernalia of an artist. He found a button, switched on lights. He saw no telephone, but there was a room beyond. He entered this, couldn't find the switch, struck another match and fumbled towards a small table beside a bed. He dialed a number in the Beekman exchange, waited, then said:

"Hello, Burt. . . . This is Donahue. Say, what time was I to call on this Crosby job? ... I see. Well, it's damned near ten now and nobody's here. . . . Sure I'm in the place. His pal let me in. ... Well, I'll hang around till ten and then I'm breezing. Okey. 'By, Burt."

The match had gone out. Donahue grumbled, swore, struck another and carried it towards the door. Before he reached the door he saw part of a man's trousered leg lying on the floor. He swung towards it, and the match's dim light began to include thighs, waist, chest, head.

Bending down he saw that neck and shirt-collar were soaked with blood.

Glazed eyes stared at the match.

The match went out.



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Donahue said, "Hell!" furiously in the darkness.

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### II

HE ROSE AND LIT another match, found the light-switch, turned on the lights. He took another look at the dead man, had to step over him to get to the farther side of the room. There was a hooked rug lying twisted on the floor as though it had been mixed up in a scuffle.

A closet door was open, and clothes lay on the floor. A yellow suitcase was open, its lining slashed apart in several places. A Gladstone had undergone similar treatment.

Drawers of a highboy were open; shirts, collars, undershirts, pajamas, handkerchiefs were jumbled on the floor. A steamer trunk, open, had its insides hacked up after the manner of the suitcase and the Gladstone. Four hats lay on the floor, their sweatbands turned inside out. Red leather bedroom slippers had been slashed.

Donahue prowled around with a keen predatory look in his eyes. He touched nothing. He came back to the dead man and rolled him over with a foot. The man's pockets had been pulled out. Bills and loose change and a rifled wallet lay on the floor near him.

Donahue sloped into the studio, snapped dark eyes around, stood spread-legged in baffled chagrin, swinging a clenched fist at his side. Canvases on plain wooden frames were strewn about. Everything was in disorder—but in this studio it might have been put down to the artist Crosby's recent homecoming.

Cruising the living-room and the bathroom, Donahue finally came to the corridor door, glared at it, then yanked it open and went running down four stair cases.—He did not know where the houseman lived, so he opened the front door, pressed the button.

A minute later the man who had first opened the door appeared, and Donahue said, "Come upstairs with me."

The little man followed, complaining that he was getting old, that it was a hard climb to the top floor. Donahue did not argue, but led the way up and then on into Crosby's apartment. When he piloted the little old man to the bedroom he did not have to point out the dead man lying on the floor.

The little man gasped, "Mr. Crosby!" in a horrified voice.

"Just wanted to make sure," Donahue said; then asked, "What's your name?"

"It's—Adler."

"Okey. Now come into the living-room with me." He took the little old man by the arm and marched him out of the bedroom, across the studio, and into the living-room. "Sit down," he said briskly, and pointed to a straight-backed chair. When the man seemed not to have heard, Donahue put a hand on either shoulder and pressed the man down into the chair with firm, gentle persistence.

"Mr. Crosby!" the little man moaned. His face twisted up and a tear fell from each eye.

Donahue was crouched over him, shaking his shoulder. "Come on, Mr. Adler—snap out of that."

"Uh—Mr. Crosby ..."

"I know, I know all about that, but snap out of it. He was probably a good guy, lived here a long time, and you liked him a lot. Okey. But don't slop all over the place now. You can do that later. But brace up. . . . Listen. My name's Donahue. You hear? It's Donahue. I'm a private cop. You hear me? I said I'm a private cop. Mr. Crosby called up the Interstate this afternoon and asked them to send a cop down. They sent me down. You get all that?"

Adler sat straight in the chair now blinking through his small spectacles. He sniffled. He gulped, "You're—a private detective?"

Donahue slapped the man's shoulder. "There! You've got it now! All right. Now pay—attention. You remember when you let me in?"

"It was eight-thirty."

"Okey. There was a man in this room when I came up. He said he roomed with Crosby."

"No—nobody roomed with Mr. Crosby."

"I know that—now—but I didn't then. Now what time did you let that man in?"

"About seven-thirty."

"He didn't give a name, did he?"

"No. He just snapped, 'Mr. Crosby.' Like that. He was a big hard-looking man—"

"What? I mean, you say he was a big man?"

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“Well, big as you . . . six feet . . . heavier than you, though.”

Donahue's dark eyes glittered. “All right. He came in at seven-thirty. Now the man in here was a small man, no taller than you. What time did he come in?”

“I didn't let anybody in but the big man.”

Donahue stood up and jammed fists against hips. He looked at the door and said, “This ain't even funny,” and his upper teeth chewed on his lower lip. Then he looked down at Adler.

“Mr. Crosby came home from Europe—when?”

“Monday—three days ago.”

“Did you ever see or let in a small young man—say about twenty-eight—with hair black as mine only smoother. He has very white even teeth and a pleasant agreeable face. ; His voice is high but nice on the ear, and it's a lively voice.”

“No, I don't remember. I'm sure I didn't.”

“All right. Now how about a woman a little smaller than you, say about twenty-six, with a small face, neat pointed chin, small teeth, and large brown eyes?”

“Well, I didn't let a woman like that in. But I came in with mail for Mr. Crosby yesterday and a woman like that was sitting in that leather chair by the fireplace. I think she came over on the boat with Mr. Crosby or met him in Europe or something. He was over there four months, you know.”

“How old was Crosby?”

“Maybe thirty he was, and very successful, he was. He made covers for magazines. And he was so cheerful and seemed much younger than he was. . . like a boy, Mr. Donahue. And he was good to me. He's lived here for six years, and I've been here ten. He used to give me clothes o' his—lots of them that was almost new. And hats. And I could wear his socks. Sure, it was just yesterday morning he gave me a suit and a couple of hats with London labels and some socks. Ah, poor young feller!” Adler wiped an eye. “Somebody'll be having to notify his uncle up in Westchester—Mr. Amos Crosby, a fine upstanding old man that loved young Mr. Crosby.”

Donahue's voice was low and husky saying, “It was rank murder, Mr. Adler—and somebody was looking for something Crosby had—something he probably brought from Europe.” He shrugged, slammed fist into palm. “Well, now the police.”

He strode through the studio, into the bedroom, paused to stare moodily at the bloodied body, then went on to the little table and picked up the telephone. He called the district station-house, and when the connection had been made he said:

“Hello, is this you, Riley? . . . This is Donahue. Say, a guy's been rubbed off down in Waverly Place. Real butcher's job. . . . Number 14. Guy name of Crosby—artist. . . . No, I don't think it's a crime of passion. . . . How did I? Well, Crosby called up Hinkle this afternoon and told him to send a man tonight. I came down. . . . No, we didn't know why he wanted us. He's just come back from Europe. So I came down, and when I got here Crosby was cold. . . . Yeah, I'll hang around till you send the plain-clothes over.”

He hung up, rose, went over and stood beside the dead man on the floor. Among the articles that had been emptied from the wallet, was a small pin seal book with gold edges. Donahue knelt down, picked it up, flipped the pages. It was an address book with alphabetical indentations. He turned to C. He found Amos Crosby, Westchester 0040. He turned to T. He found L. T. scrawled in pencil, beneath it, Avalon-Plaza, and a Schuyler telephone number. He returned to the telephone and called that number.

When a voice said, “Hotel Avalon-Plaza,” Donahue said, “Will you connect me with Miss Tenquist?” There was a long pause, then the voice saying, “Sorry, sir. Miss Tenquist does not answer.” Donahue said, “Thanks,” and hung up.

He dialed the Agency next and said, “Burt. Hello, Burt. This is Donahue. Crosby's been croaked. . . . Yeah. It's a long story and the plain-clothes 'll be in any minute. All the time I was waiting for him he was dead in another room. . . . Absolute. A guy I've seen, a broad, and another guy I haven't seen, are mixed up in it. Crosby has an uncle in Westchester. Money, I guess. We may get a job if you call him up and notify him of his nephew's death. Spread it thick. Tell him the boy had engaged us. Number's West-Chester 0040. . . . Okey, Burt. Be seeing you later.”

When he got back to the living-room, Adler was still sitting on the chair, head in hands. A bell rang loudly somewhere distant, and Adler started, got up.

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“The front door,” he said, and hurried out sniffing.

Donahue was standing before the fireplace lighting a cigarette when the door opened. A man in plain-clothes came in followed by two uniformed policemen. The man in plain-clothes was tall, lank, lantern-jawed. He wore a faded gray overcoat and a soft hat that had been made shapeless by many rains.

“Hello, Donahue,” he said glumly.

“Hello, Roper.”

“Where's he?”

“Across the studio.”

Roper had his hands in his pockets and his shoulders huddled up to his ears, as though he were chilly. The two cops were young, in bright uniforms. They followed Roper.

Adler came in rubbing his hands slowly together against his meagre chest. He looked helplessly at Donahue. Donahue smiled reassuringly but said nothing.

Roper's heavy slow footfalls came back across the bare studio floor, and then he came into the living-room.

“That's nice,” he said. He looked at Adler. “Who's this?”

“Houseman,” Donahue said.

Roper said, “Yeah?” and then moved towards the fireplace, pulled a chair up close to it and sat down with his back to the fire huddling his big bony shoulders. He looked mournful and detached.

“Now,” he said, “let's go over it.”

Donahue, holding the little black address book in a clenched hand in his pocket, smiled with long narrow teeth and said, “Sure, Roper,” amicably.

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### III

WHEN DONAHUE LEFT the house in Waverly Place, it was ten–twenty, and the Morgue bus was drawing up to the curb. There was no crowd, since no commotion had attended the quiet murder of Crosby; and crowds in Waverly Place are rare anyhow.

Donahue crunched stout shoes on freezing slush as he headed west, turned into Sheridan Square. He crossed the Square and went down into dark windy Grove Street. Where a dim yellow light glowed from a door submerged five feet beneath the level of the sidewalk. Donahue turned down the flight of stone steps, passed through the open doorway, turned right against a closed door, opened it, walked ten feet down a narrow corridor, opened another door, and entered a long bar at which stood eight scattered men.

The slack–faced barman, who was idly picking his teeth, said, “Lo, Donny.”

“Bunt,” Donahue said. “Scotch and soda.”

“How's the racket?”

“On the up and up.”

While the barman was uncorking the Scotch, Donahue walked the length of the bar, entered a telephone booth. The sound of the nickel dropping in the slot was audible outside the booth. Donahue talked for a minute, hung up. Then another nickel made a noise. He talked again, hung up, came out and picked up a pickle from the lunch counter on his way to the bar. He downed the Scotch straight, chased it with soda, rang a half dollar on the bar.

He said, “Be seeing you, Bunt,” and walked out.

Returning to Sheridan Square, he went down a West Side Subway kiosk, took a northbound local to Fourteenth Street, left the local and caught a northbound express. Ten minutes later he left the express at Seventy–second Street, took a local to Seventy–ninth, got off and climbed the stairway to Broadway. He walked one block west and turned south into West End Avenue.

The Avalon–Plaza was a small apartment–hotel better than middle class, just short of swank. Donahue passed a braided doorman, pushed a revolving door around, climbed three marble steps, turned right and climbed three more, and then walked down a narrow quiet foyer. To the corpulent complacent man at the desk he said, “Will you tell Miss Tenquist that Mr. Donahue is calling?”

The man said, “Certainly,” and repeated the names to the switchboard operator. When he turned back to Donahue saying, “Yes,” Donahue asked, “What number?” And the man said, “A–455.”

A small silent elevator whisked Donahue to the fourth floor, and the elevator boy leaned out to point and say, “Down that way, sir, around the bend.”

There was a brass knocker shaped like a harp on the door marked A–455. Donahue raised it and let it fall back to its brass base.

The latch clicked and Miss Tenquist looked quizzically at Donahue. She had loose brown hair and wore a blue peignoir casually and becomingly.

He eyed her steadily with round hard brown eyes and showed his long narrow teeth in a fixed smile.

Without saying anything, the woman stepped aside and looked around the room vaguely, and while she was doing that Donahue walked into a small but not inexpensive living–room. To the left were two doors. One led to a bathroom; the other to a bedroom.

When she had closed the door, Donahue, hat in hand, said, “I called you from downtown.”

“Yes?” She was eyeing him strangely, uncertainly, and color was creeping into her cheeks.

He was smiling at her fixedly. “I didn't tell you over the phone that Crosby'd been murdered.”

Her small white fingers flew to her mouth but did not succeed in stopping an explosive, “Oh!” that burst from spread lips. Her brown eyes dilated wide with sudden horror. Then the lids wavered, the eyes rolled a bit. Donahue took a step toward her, arms outthrust. She backed away, putting the back of her hand against her forehead. She *sank* to a divan and said breathlessly, “Oh . . . murdered!” tragically.

“Yes,” Donahue clipped. He went on rapidly in a blunt incisive voice, “He'd been murdered when you got there. He'd been murdered before I got there. He was lying in his bedroom all the time and I didn't know it.”

She said, “Oh, oh,” behind teeth that tried to close hard: and a harried look battled in her eyes.

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"Listen," Donahue said, sitting down beside her. "You were worried when you came there tonight. Who are you? How long have you known Crosby?"

"I've known him—quite a while."

"Not so long. I happen to know you came over on the boat with him."

She caught her breath, trained her eyes on the carpet. "Yes, I did. I knew him in Europe. We met in Europe."

"Listen. When you came in tonight, how did you get in?"

She had her handkerchief pressed against her mouth now. She looked squarely at Donahue with her wide-open eyes. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I mean, ordinarily you ring the front door—bell to get in that house. You didn't. You came right in. You must have had a key."

She swallowed. "Who are you?"

"I told you my name. That's not answering my question. Did you have a key?"

She got up and started walking around the room. Donahue got up and trailed her around the room, asking, "Now did you, did you?" She whirled and cried, half in tears, "What if I did have a key?"

He stopped and spread his hands palmwise, saying, "That's what I wanted to know. Then you had a key. You must have been a very good friend of Crosby's." He smiled crookedly. "Very intimate, eh?"

She looked confused. "If you want to put it that way."

"That's all right by me," he grinned. "We'll forget all about that. But here's something else. That guy I said was Crosby's room-mate wasn't. Why didn't you tell me nobody lived with Crosby when I made that crack?"

"I still don't know what right you have to ask all these questions?"

"When I mentioned that guy, I remember you kind of tightened up—as if you knew who I meant." He lowered his voice, hardened it. "Listen to me, little girl, it's all right if you were playing house with Crosby—that was his privilege and yours. But when a guy gets his throat carved and you act dumb when I shoot questions at you—" He shook his head. "That doesn't go at all—not with this baby."

She was trembling, but she put fire in her voice when she cried, "Who—who are you?"

"Just a private cop earning his salary. . . . You knew Crosby well. All right. He sent for a private cop. Now you ought to know why. We don't know. He called up and said he'd explain when we sent a man down. So I went down. This smooth-faced guy let me in, saying he was Crosby's room-mate. Then you drift in. Say, who was after Crosby—and why?"

She blew her nose and shook her head and said beneath her handkerchief in a panicky voice, "I don't know! He didn't tell me anything!"

Fury leaped in Donahue's dark eyes. His hand shot out, caught the girl's wrist and he heaved her close up against him.

He snarled, "I hope to tell you you're a damned little liar!"

"Ow . . . you're hurting!"

He released her abruptly and she fled backwards across the room. He chopped off an oath that did not quite get to his lips and scowled darkly at the girl.

"Don't pull a song and dance on me!" he rapped out. "We can get along fine as long as you don't play me for a jackass. Come on now, break clean. What kind of a racket are you in on?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about."

"I said don't song-and-dance!"

"I tell you—"

A knock on the corridor door stopped her. She flung a look at the door. She flung a look at Donahue. Donahue made a motion for her to open the door while his right hand went around to his hip-pocket and drew out a Colt's .38 revolver with an abbreviated two-inch barrel. He took six backward steps into the bath-room, left the door open.

The girl had her hand on the knob of the corridor door and all color had drained from her face.

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### IV

SHE OPENED the door. Her body stiffened and her hands started towards her breast. She backed up as the small neat young man came in slowly and smiled with his agree-able white teeth. His right hand was significantly in the pocket of his ulster. He reached around back with his left hand, closed the door, stood with his back against it and turned the key in the lock.

He said in his pleasant lively voice, "Hello, Irene."

The girl had backed up against one arm of the divan, and she sat tensely against it, hunched forward, in an awkward position that had about it something of breathless-ness. Her brown eyes were fixed wide on the small neat young man. His rather dark luminous eyes twinkled.

He said, casually, "Babe didn't get it."

She scraped the side of the divan with clawing fingers. Fear began to distort her face, and she kept twisting her head from side to side. Her lips opened, her teeth opened, and she began to breathe hoarsely.

The small neat young man came forward, taking his time, smiling pleasantly. He said, "And *I* didn't get it."

She cringed, held her arms out, palms towards the man. She crouched behind the palms.

She choked, "Babe ... you didn't—"

"No, Irene. I didn't. Not that. I just slugged him. . . . Aren't you the two-timing little—"

"For God's sake, Alfred ... go out!"

"Don't try to kid me. Babe's not here. Babe's still in the land of nod, as the poets say. . . . And will it be poetic justice if I break your nice sweet jaw?"

"Alfred! . . ."

"I'm talking, Irene. What a jack I've been. I always knew you used to be sweet on Babe, nuts on him, but I thought that was all over—"

"I swear it is, Alfred!"

"Bah!" You two-timed on me, but Babe didn't get it. Maybe he did get it. But he didn't have it. He passed it on to someone ... to you."

"No—no!"

Alfred drew out a very small but business-like automatic and leveled it at the girl's breast.

He said quietly, "One of us has it. Babe hasn't. I haven't. *You* have!"

"Please ... I swear! ..."

He raised his left hand slowly and placed the fingers around the girl's throat. He pressed the muzzle of the gun against her breast. He smiled at her.

"For two-timing, Irene, you ought to get a belly full of this. I may yet. But first, I want to know who has it."

"I—don't know, Alfred! That's God's truth! Go out ... come back later!"

He laughed leisurely, tightened his fingers on her throat until she gagged and raised her hands to grip the arm that held her. She teetered on the arm of the divan, lost her balance, fell backward on the divan kicking up white smooth legs.

Alfred took two steps and looked down at her where she lay panting and rubbing her throat. He leaned over a bit and slapped her face. She cried, "Ow!" and she meant it.

Alfred slammed the pistol against her ribs and she screeched. He stood up, took two more steps, turned on a radio. A jazz band boomed into the room. He returned to the divan and struck the girl again—with the gun. He planted a knee on her stomach and went on striking her. He did not look mad, merely interested in his work.

Donahue stepped from the bath-room, walked across the carpet, stopped behind, Alfred, and when Alfred's gun hand rose, Donahue gripped it, twisted sharply and spun Alfred around to face him. Alfred's gun was in Donahue's left hand, and Donahue's, gun was in his own right hand. Donahue struck Alfred playfully on the head with Alfred's gun, and when Alfred fell back grunting, Donahue grinned and said:

"Does hurt, doesn't it?"

Alfred regained his poise, smiled and said, "Yes, a bit."

The girl sat up, sobbing. She rose and burst out crying and stumbled to the bath-room.

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Donahue eyed Alfred and said, "Turn off the radio."

Alfred turned off the radio. He smoothed his collar, pushed back his black smooth hair and kept looking at Donahue with mild and polite interest.

"You're a smooth——" Donahue said drily.

Alfred smiled, said, "Association," brightly.

Donahue said, "Well, I'm not smooth. And I don't like smooth guys."——.

"Do you mind if I light a cigarette?"

"Yes I mind."

Alfred shrugged. "You're uncommonly hard to get on with."

"I'm damned hard to get on with."

Alfred sighed. Then his face brightened. "Irene is a very temperamental soul."

"We'll discuss *you* right now. Never mind about Irene. . . . Listen, you——what the hell was the idea of handing me a line in Crosby's apartment?"

"Must we go into *that*?"

"Oh, I think we ought to——since it's very likely you carved the poor slob's throat."

Alfred laughed lightly. "Now, now, Mr. Holmes!"

Donahue took three hard steps and jammed his own gun so hard against Alfred's chest that Alfred exploded, "Ugh!" and almost fell down.

Donahue clipped, "You're not funny at all, bozo!"

Alfred got his breath back, laughed in confusion, shoved back his hair and said, "My, you're like a regular New York cop."

Donahue struck Alfred on the head and Alfred fell down on the floor, sat with his head in his hands and rocked back and forth groaning.——j

Donahue said, "I don't like wisenheimers."

He got down on one knee. He put Alfred's gun in his pocket and used the hand that had held the gun to pull Alfred's hands from his face. Alfred's eyes were wet and he looked peeved.

"You don't have to be so rough," he said.

"You don't have to make those musical comedy wisecracks. . . . Listen to me, brother. You're in a tough spot. Crosby was carved, and you were in his apartment when I got there. Crosby was murdered because he had something that you guys wanted. You're a red-hot——so is the jane . . . but you're hotter than she is because she came there *after* the murder. She came in while I was there. We notified Crosby's uncle that his nephew had got a dose, and the old boy's coming into town like a bat out of hell——and he told us to carry on with the investigation. I'm carrying on——and you're going to talk before I walk you into a pinch."

Alfred became thoughtful. He said sadly, "Say, I am in a tough spot, ain't I?"

"I wouldn't fool you!"

The girl came back into the room sniffing and saying, "You dirty little rat, trying to link me with your dirty little schemes! I told you to stay away from me——to leave me alone. I want nothing to do with you. I'm sick and tired of being drawn into your schemes, and I'm sick and tired of seeing you."

She picked up a heavy bronze book—end and hefted it. Hot scarlet overran her cheeks and her brown eyes blazed.

Alfred raised his hand. "Now don't throw that, Irene."

Donahue put in, "I thought it was Leone."

She came over and stood quivering, the book—end in an upraised arm. "You're a very small rat!" she cried.

Alfred said, "Now don't, Irene——"

Donahue looked at Alfred and said, "Just for fun I ought to encourage her."

The girl's hand came down swiftly.

Donahue felt the book—end strike his head. He knew he was reeling. He knew blackness cascaded down upon him. There was another blow, a laugh——Alfred's quiet laugh—— and then there wasn't anything.



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### V

COMING TO AT MIDNIGHT, Donahue lay in the darkness for a few minutes feeling his head. When he touched a bump near the crown he said, "Ugh!" and then cursed. Then he sat up. He could see two windows, the night sky beyond them, some tattered star fragments. He fumbled in his pockets for a match, found one, struck a light and then moved towards the electric switch. He snapped on the lights.

He was still in the same apartment. He said, "Hell and damn," earnestly, and prowled around, wearing a brown predatory look. The bedroom was empty. Bureau drawers were open—empty; clothes closet was open—empty. He went around into the bath-room. It had been cleaned out except for a bottle with a little Listerine in it. Donahue poured it into a glass, added water, slushed his mouth out, spat noisily.

Alfred and the girl Irene had pulled a fade-away. Donahue wet his hair, brushed it back with his fingers, washed face and hands and dried them. Returning to the living-room, he saw his gun lying on the divan. He picked it up, saw it was still loaded and replaced it in his overcoat pocket. His brown face was hard, sullen; he muttered diatribes in his throat behind his narrow clenched teeth. He went into the bedroom again, looked beneath twin beds, dumped out the contents of a waste basket.

He threw aside crumpled empty cigarette packets, a tooth-paste box, a copy of the *Evening Sun*, a theatre program of the Lyric showing *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, a Bascom ticket envelope, a passenger list of the *S. S. Driatic*, a dry cleaner's bill, a colored cardboard box that had contained hairpins, an empty vanishing-cream jar, an empty rose-colored bottle—that had contained fingernail polish.

Donahue reclaimed the passenger list of the *S. S. Driatic*. Under the C's he found Robert C. Crosby. Under the T's he found Alfred P. *Tenquist*; beneath this, Miss *Leone Tenquist*. He folded the booklet and thrust it into his pocket. His dark eyes glittered as he bent to throw the other articles back into the waste-basket.

He returned to the living-room, picked up his Borsalino, slapped it carelessly on his head and cringed, exploding, "Damn!" It was the bump on his head. He drew in a breath and went towards the door, making a sour face. He passed into the corridor, buzzed for an elevator. When one stopped he got in. When the doors slid open on the main floor, a man squeezed in as Donahue was going out, and as Donahue walked away he heard a bass voice say:

"I want A-455."

Donahue stopped in his tracks, stood rooted but did not look around. Then he went on walking through the lobby, passed out into the street and turned south. Half a block away three taxis stood in a row at the curb. Donahue passed the first and walked up to the second. He handed the driver a dollar.

"This guy ahead of you may get a call any minute," he said. "Maybe I'll want you to follow him."

The driver reached back an arm and opened the door. "Okey, chief."

Donahue climbed in the back, lit a butt and watched the entrance of the Avalon-Plaza. About five minutes later a man came out. The doorman blew a whistle and the first taxi got into gear and drove up to the hotel entrance.

"Follow that guy," Donahue said.

The driver started his motor, meshed gears but held the clutch out. When the first taxi pulled away from the curb the second did likewise.

The first taxi turned east on Seventy-ninth Street, south into Riverside Drive. Donahue's man stayed half a block behind, but sped up when a Packard sport and a checkered cab got in between him and the *green* cab he was trailing. He passed the Packard and the checkered job and followed the green taxi around the blinker into Seventy-second Street, then south on West End Avenue. At Fifty-ninth Street, West End Avenue becomes Eleventh and shoots south past railroad yards and switching engines; becomes a rough, shoddy and dark street without traffic stops, where trucks and taxis slam recklessly on their way. The tail turned east into Fortieth Street, crossed Tenth Avenue, roared beneath the Ninth Avenue Elevated and started to slow down just west of Eighth Avenue. The green taxi was pulling into the curb; Donahue's was a hundred yards behind, drifting leisurely. The green cab was stopped when Donahue's rolled past, and the big man was getting out in front of a lighted doorway that was flush with the street.

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Donahue leaned forward and said, "I'll get out at Eighth." When he alighted he gave the driver another dollar, then walked west on Fortieth until he came to the lighted doorway. He walked into the open lobby, looked around for a button, saw none. He got on his toes and ran his fingers along the top of the door frame. He found a button there, pressed it. A minute later the door opened and Donahue walked in saying, "Hello, buddy."

He walked on down a narrow low-ceiled corridor, passed a kitchen, entered a small bar beyond which was a dining-room where a slot gramophone was raising a lot of noise and dancing feet were shuffling.

The man who had come out of the Avalon-Plaza was standing at the far end of the short bar watching the spectacled bartender mix a whiskey-sour. Donahue put a foot on the rail a dozen feet from the man and watched him in the mirror. When the bartender came down the line mop ping the bar Donahue said:

"Scotch and soda."

"Punk night out, eh?"

"Pretty lousy."

Donahue was trying his drink when the big man ordered another whiskey-sour. The big man wore a voluminous tan polo coat, a brown silk muffler, and a rakish large-brimmed brown hat. His face was big, bronzed and bulged at the eyebrows. His gimlet eyes were hidden in tight folds of flesh, and his mouth was wide and drooped at the corners. When he had drunk half of the second whiskey-sour he turned and rolled to a telephone-booth, closed himself in, talked on the telephone briefly, came out again and finished the drink. He threw a bill on the bar, said "Night," gruffly and stamped down the narrow corridor, wearing a scowl. Donahue had finished the Scotch and soda. The bartender took sixty cents out of a dollar and Donahue left the bar, pocketing the change.

When he came out into Fortieth Street he saw the big man half a block away heading east. Donahue tailed him to Broadway, where the man climbed into a yellow cab. Donahue boarded a black-and-white, said, "Follow that yellow," and sat on the edge of the back seat watching. The yellow cab turned east into Thirty-fourth Street, crossed Fifth, Madison and Park; turned north on Lexington and west into Thirty-seventh Street and crawled into the curb on the upgrade. Donahue told his driver to keep going, spotted the three story graystone in front of which the yellow had stopped and told the driver to pull up at the taxi stand at Thirty-seventh and Lexington.

He walked down Thirty-seventh on the left side of the street, watched the right. He was opposite the graystone walk-up when he saw lights appear on the third floor behind windows that had shades drawn all the way down. All other windows were dark—had been dark when the taxi drew up. Donahue walked a little farther down, crossed the street, came back up and climbed six stone steps to an open vestibule door. Stepping into the vestibule, he saw a brass plate with four buttons running vertically beside four niches for name. The top niche was the only one that had no name.

He pressed the top button. A minute later the door clicked and Donahue opened it, looked into a dimly lighted corridor. He stood there, reached out and pressed the button again. He listened, looking at the latch. It began clicking again. When it stopped Donahue waited another minute, pressed it again, still holding the door open. The lock began clicking. Donahue smiled to himself, his eyes narrowed shrewdly. While the lock was clicking Donahue pressed his finger against the button, held it there for half a minute. The lock stopped clicking. Donahue gave the button another short push, then shoved his head into the hall and listened. He heard footfalls somewhere above.

He stepped into the hall, closed the door, went quickly and silently to the rear of the lower hall. He turned and waited in the shadows. The footfalls came down, walked the length of the corridor above, then came down the staircase to the lower hall.

Donahue saw the big man striding towards the hall door. The big man reached the door, drew the curtains aside, peered through the glass. He listened. His actions indicated that he was becoming suspicious.

Meanwhile Donahue was sliding through the shadows, hugging the shadowy base of the staircase. His right hand came out of his pocket holding the Colt's revolver. He held the gun in front of him and was ten feet behind the big man when he said:

"Suppose you raise 'em, Babe."

The big man whirled hugely, sucking in a breath, and his right hand tightened on something in the pocket of his coat.

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### VI

DONAHUE'S VOICE was low, clipped—"You heard me, Babe! Get that hand out of your pocket! And get your hands up."

"What the hell is this?—"

"Those hands, Babe!"

The big man snarled and thrust his big hands upward.

Donahue said, "Get over here . . . kneel on this lower step."

"Say you—"

"Get over here!"

The big man lunged, fell to his knees on the lower step.

"Now lie down on the steps."

"I'll be—"

"Get down and keep your hands out straight beyond your head. That's the way." Donahue went through the man's pockets, took out an automatic pistol. "Now bring the hands down behind your back—and be nice."

"You're sure a careful guy, ain't you?"

"Pretty careful, Babe." Donahue clipped manacles deftly on the man's wrists, then stepped back and said, "Now get up and we'll go up to your flat."

"I don't get this at all, guy."

"I don't myself. Maybe we can figure things out. Up you go, Babe." Donahue prodded him in the small of the back with his revolver, and the man started upward, and Donahue kept the gun against his back as they climbed more stairs and then walked into a room whose door had been left open. It was the front room, the living-room that looked out on Thirty-seventh Street. It was a big room, well furnished, and behind it was an equally large bedroom.

Donahue locked the corridor door, left the key in the lock. The big man had turned and was backing sullenly across the room, big head hunched between massive shoulders. His eyes could not be seen for the puffy rolls of flesh that drew together over them, yet at times there was a faint glint.

Open French doors connected living-room and bedroom, and Donahue went into the bedroom sidewise, keeping an-eye on the big man. He pulled open a clothes closet, closed it. He looked into the bath-room. Coming back towards the living-room, he paused in front of a bureau, sniffed. He looked at the things on the bureau. He picked up a crumpled lace handkerchief, put it down, proceeded into the living-room wearing a droll smile.

"Irene wears a nice perfume, Babe."

The big man growled, "Say, who the hell are you?"

"Who do you think?"

"I don't think. I don't know. The bracelets say a dick, but dicks don't bust into houses alone."

Donahue said, "I had a talk with Irene and I had a talk with Alfred. They haven't got it. You must have it."

"Got what?"

"The bulls are kind of worked up over the Crosby kill, Babe. The guy who killed Crosby got it. I got there late. You were there before me, and Alfred was there after you. I didn't get it. Alfred didn't get it. Irene was there, too, but she didn't get it. You—must have got it."

The big man knit his brows, chewed on a thick nether lip. His big nose wrinkled. He looked baffled. Donahue was a dark lean man eyeing him narrowly.

The big man growled, "Come on, guy, lay your cards on the table. Cut out the sparring."

Donahue smiled bleakly. "I don't have to lay any cards on any table, Babe. I'm top-dog. You do the laying."

"Suppose I don't lay?"

"Suppose you do."

"I said—suppose I don't?"

Donahue dropped his voice ominously. "A dick named Roper's on the job. He's a hard guy, Babe. I can always

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reach him by telephone.”

The big man snarled, “You're a——stoolie trying to step into big time!”

“Okey . . . then I'm a stoolie. But that's got nothing to do with what you are, or what I want from you. Every stoolie has his price. You know mine.”

“What do you want?”

“You know what I want. I want the same thing Irene wants, the same thing Alfred wants. They know you carved Crosby trying to get it. I know it too.”

The big man's face was getting red. His breath rushed hoarsely through wide nostrils and his hands strained at the manacles.

“Did Irene? . . .” he choked.

“She did after I beat her a while. She said you must have got it when you carved Crosby.”

The big man lunged towards Donahue, brought up against Donahue's gun. His eyes were shining dagger points in the slits of flesh.

“How the hell did you muscle in on this?”

Donahue smiled. “Open season, Babe. . . . Don't shove—your belly too hard against this rod.”

The big man, sucked in a huge breath, held it, then let it gush out boisterously. “Damn it, I didn't carve Crosby! Irene's a liar!”

“Punk, Babe. You called on Crosby, turned the joint inside out and carved him. That's open and shut. You were seen going in. . . . Now where is it?”

“I don't know! I haven't got it! Irene or Alfred's got it. And she's a liar if she said I carved Crosby. I was down; there. All right, I was down there. What the hell of it? I was Crosby's bootlegger. I was before he went to Paris. He called me up when he came back. I brought him around three bottles of Scotch because my runner was out. I never run around with the stuff ordinary. But Crosby was a good buyer.”

Donahue wrinkled his brown forehead. “You might have been his bootlegger, Babe, but you got in on something bigger. You had something to do with this racket the woman and Alfred 're in on. You're Irene's boy friend. You and Irene double—crossed Alfred.”

“Say, fella, you know a hell of a lot about this.”

“I get around, Babe.”

The big man tied his face up in puzzled wrinkles. “I'm damned if you're a stoolie! You're getting more like plain—clothes every minute!”

“Do you come across, big boy, or do I put through a telephone call? If you didn't slice Crosby you know who did.”

“So you're a dick, eh? So you're a dick?” The big man scowled darkly, snarled, “You can go to hell! If you think I'm a red—hot, you're all wet.”

The telephone bell jangled. Donahue started towards it, then motioned the big man over.

He said, “Sit down and answer it.”

“Me with manacles?”

“I'll hold the receiver for you.”

The big man sat down at the library table. Donahue took off the receiver, placed it near the big man's ear, put his own ear near it.

Irene's voice said, “Babe!”

Babe said, “Yeah.”

“I'm coming over! I've got to see you! I'll be over in twenty minutes!”

Donahue whispered, “Tell her sure, Babe.”

Babe grumbled, “Sure, come on.”

“Oh, Babe, I've had one hell of a time! I'm all in! But I'll be over——in twenty minutes.”

“Sure, Irene.”

Donahue hung up saying, “This is sure a break, Babe. Now be a strong silent man. . . . So you and the broad have been two—timing on Alfred all along, eh?”

“——for you.”

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“And you think I'm a dick, eh?”

“I don't know what you are. I'm beginning to think again you're a stoolie doublecrossing the cops.”

Donahue chuckled drily. “We'll wait and see what Irene thinks about it.” He took out a key-ring. “I'm going to plant you in that easy chair facing the door. Your hands are going to be manacled in front, and there'll be a newspaper over them. You stay in the chair, taking it easy: the prosperous bootlegger at home. I'll be in the bedroom watching you. One step out of turn and you get the works.”

“I'd give a thousand bucks to know just what you are, guy.”

Donahue laughed good-naturedly. “Hell, what a piker you turned out to be!”

The big man growled petulantly, “Jeeze, you're an aggravating kinda guy!”

VII

WHEN THE door-bell rang the man called Babe was sitting in an easy-chair with a newspaper lying across his lap.

Donahue said, "When she knocks, just say come in to her. Don't get up."

"You're boss just now, fella."

"Okey." Donahue walked to the corridor door, pressed a brass button on a brass plate beside it. Then he unlocked the door. The entrance to the bedroom was to the left of the corridor door as one came in, and one entering would be unable to look into the bedroom until he had reached about the center of the living-room. The big man sat across the room from the corridor door but faced it squarely. One of the two front windows was directly behind him.

When Donahue entered the bedroom he turned its lights out and took up a position behind a highboy, around whose front corner he could peer into the living-room and see the big man but not the corridor door.

He called quietly, "For the time being, Babe, you're on the spot. Play ball."

The big man droned sullenly, "Okey, fella."

A moment later a light knock sounded on the door.

The big man said, "Come in."

There was a pause. Then the door hanged open.

Donahue saw the big man heave in the chair, throw off the newspaper, open his mouth, start to get up.

A silenced gun popped.

The big man slammed-back into the chair snapping out his legs. He toppled with the chair. Donahue leaped across the bedroom.

Footfalls were hammering down the stairs. Donahue streaked out into the hallway, looked over the balustrade. The feet were hurrying down the staircase below. Donahue forked the balustrade, shot down backwards, landed on his feet, raced down the next staircase. He heard someone stirring in one of the apartments. He rapped the door as he sped past and yelled, "Man shot on-top floor!" He boomed down into the lower hall, burst out into Thirty-seventh Street.

There was a man racing towards Lexington Avenue, hugging the buildings. Donahue started long legs flying, swung south on Lexington. The man was half a block ahead of him. He was a small man, swift as the wind. He was Alfred.

He shot down Thirty-sixth Street, turned south on Third Avenue. The avenue was deserted. Store fronts were dark. An Elevated train threshed by overhead, southbound.

Alfred reached the Thirty-fourth Street station, bolted up the stairway. Donahue hammered up behind him.—When he reached the platform the train had pulled out. Alfred had crossed the tracks, was rushing through the turnstile on the northbound platform.

Donahue turned and went down the steps he had climbed, crossed Third Avenue and saw Alfred running north, now a block distant. At Thirty-eighth Street Alfred leaped aboard a cruising taxi, disappeared in the back. Donahue yelled, ran out into the street, flagged a southbound taxi.

"Tail that blue cab, bud!" he clipped as he jumped in the back and slammed the door.

The taxi wheeled about in the middle of the block, shifted into high, roared north beneath the Elevated structure. The blue cab made a left turn into Thirty-ninth Street, turned north on Lexington. It went through a red traffic light. Donahue's cab went through a red traffic light. The blue cab swung left at Forty-second Street, skidded on street-car rails. Alfred jumped off at Grand Central, Donahue handed the driver fifty cents, dropped off before the cab stopped, galloped on the sidewalk and shoved in through heavy swing-doors.

When he reached the rotunda of the upper level Alfred was at the other end heading into a passageway at a fast walk. When he saw Donahue he broke into a run, took the underground entrance to the Commodore, came out into Forty-second Street and headed east at a fast walk. Donahue made him break into a run again, and they raced east past the News Building.

Alfred winged a taxi at Second Avenue. Donahue stopped on the corner and watched the taxi speed south. A

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minute passed before he hailed one swinging out of Forty-second Street, and when they were under way the other cab was three blocks beyond. An Elevated train was crashing southbound overhead. The taxi that Alfred had taken slewed into the curb at the Thirty-fourth Street Elevated station, and Alfred leaped out, darted up the stairway as the train was pulling in alongside the platform.

Donahue leaned forward and said, "Shoot down to Twenty-third Street."

"Listen, boss——"

"No fireworks——honest, buddy," Donahue said.

Taxi sped southward between steel Elevated pillars. Train sped southward overhead. At Twenty-third Street the Elevated swings east for a block, then south again on First Avenue. Between Second and First Avenues is the Twenty-third Street station. Donahue's taxi reached it four blocks ahead of the train. Donahue got out, paid up, climbed the staircase and stood behind a partition at the platform exit.

The train pulled in slowly after having made the turn. It was pretty empty. Train gates opened——closed. Quick footsteps sounded on the platform. Alfred appeared, strode past the partition behind which Donahue crouched. Donahue took a fast step after him and said:

"All right, Alfred——quiet, now!"

Alfred stopped short when Donahue poked a gun muzzle against Alfred's back.

"Hands out of pockets," Donahue said.

Alfred took his hands from his pockets. Donahue frisked with his left hand, said, "Turn around." Alfred turned around, his small face white and breathless. Donahue reached inside Alfred's ulster, drew a pistol from the ulster's inside pocket. There was a silencer attached. Donahue shoved gun and silencer into his own inside pocket. His mouth was tight, a windy look was in his eyes.

"Now, you——we'll go places," he said.

"Listen, Donahue——"

"Down those steps, sweet man——and a wisecrack out of you and I'll break your jaw. Get!"

He grabbed Alfred's arm, walked him rapidly down the staircase. Alfred was like a man in a daze. He kept on trying to say things but somehow he seemed unable to utter a word.

But finally he said, "Where——are we going?"

"Ever hear of a dick named Roper?"

Alfred winced. "You mean——Bat Roper?"

"They tell me he bats hell out of guys."

Alfred dragged to a stop. "Gripes, Donahue——"

"You're such a red-hot, though, that maybe he won't have to bat you. Quit stalling! Come on!"

Alfred hung back, setting his small mouth firmly. Three men were coming up Second Avenue.

Donahue rough-housed Alfred. "Damn you——"

Alfred leaped at Donahue yelling, "Help! Help!"

"You——!" Donahue snapped.

Alfred clawed at him, yelling for help, struggling frantically. The three men broke into a run, shouting. They were big men——East Siders. Donahue clouted Alfred on the head with his gun. Alfred screamed. The three men came up yelling.

Donahue shouted, "Stay off, you guys!"

Alfred buried his teeth in Donahue's arm. Donahue kicked Alfred's shins. The three men landed on Donahue and whaled him with hard fists. Alfred broke away, raced down Second Avenue.

Donahue shouted, "You fools, that's a killer! I'm a cop!"

"Yeah, you're a cop!"

"Damn your souls, clear out!" Donahue roared. He whipped his gun back and forth, laying open a cheek; : plunged through the men, streaked off after Alfred. Alfred swung west into Twenty-first Street. Donahue took the corner wide, saw Alfred speeding towards Gramercy Park.

He yelled, "Stop, you! I tell you, stop!"

Alfred did not stop. He was swift for a small man. But Donahue stopped, clicking his teeth together. He raised his gun, looked down it, pulled the trigger. Flame and smoke burst from the muzzle. The street boomed. Alfred reeled sidewise, fell, slid on his side into the gutter.

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When Donahue came running up Alfred was crawling on his side, moaning hysterically. He was dragging his left leg.

When Donahue reached down Alfred screamed like a maniac. Windows were grating open. Lights were springing to life. Alfred screamed till his voice broke—and then he coughed, choked—but kept on crawling, leaving a thin trail of blood. Donahue reached down again, grabbed Alfred's shoulder.

"A guy would think you had places to go," he said. "Snap out of it, dumb bell."

Alfred stopped crawling but screamed again—, until his voice broke, banged his head on the pavement and swept the air with his hands.

Donahue knelt down and grabbed him by the throat. "And you're not going to bang your brains out!"

Running footsteps came down the street. Metal buttons and a shield gleamed, and a gun shone dully as a policeman passed beneath a street light.

A bull voice yelled, "Hey, you!"

Donahue looked up saying, "Come on, copper. There's a red-hot here."

The policeman slowed to a heavy-soled walk. He was broad, stocky, young, with his cap raked over one ear. "What the hell's this?" he growled.

"This guy smoked out a bird up in Thirty-seventh Street. I've been tailing him. I nailed him on the Twenty-third Street L station, but he got wise and tried a break."

"Yeah? *and* who the hell are you?"

"Don't get tough, cobby. I'm an Interstate boy. This gun's mixed up in the Crosby kill."

"That job down in Waverly Place tonight?"

"Yeah. . . . Better phone an ambulance. I potted him in the left leg."

"Where's his rod?"

"I've got it here—in my pocket."

"How'd you happen to get it?"

Donahue stood up. "For crying out loud, don't be a rookie, copper. I asked him if he'd mind giving it to me. He said he'd be tickled."

"You're a wise" guy, ain't you?"

"Nah, I'm not a wise guy. I hate wise guys. . . . Do you telephone or do you want me to?"

"I'll telephone. Just don't get wise—don't get wise." Half a dozen persons had come out of doorways and were edging nearer. The policeman strode towards them saying, "I want a phone." Somebody said, "Right here, officer. What happened?" The policeman didn't say what happened, and hurried through an open doorway.

Alfred was gibbering now. He began to bang his head against the pavement again screaming, "Mother o' God!" in a frenzied voice.

A woman's voice quavered, "Oh . . . the poor man."

Donahue dropped to his knees and held Alfred's head locked in his arm.

He said, "No, you don't, Alfred. No, you don't."

Alfred groaned, "Why didn't you finish me—why the hell didn't you finish me?"

"I should do favors for you!" Donahue said; chuckled, added, "Yes, I should!" He was running his right hand through Alfred's pockets. Something clinked in his fingers.



## Six Deadly Dames

### VIII

WHEN DONAHUE WAS striding past the hospital desk Roper came in huddled in his threadbare coat and stepped side wise so that he blocked Donahue. Donahue stopped, smiled amiably and said:

“Hello, Roper.”

The dour-faced precinct bull said, “Hello,” dully. He spoke very slowly, way down in his throat. His big lazy eyes were expressionless. His lantern-jawed, muddy brown face was inanimate—and because of that, somehow threatening.

Donahue said, “They're upstairs swabbing out the little guy's wound. They tell me Babe Delaney got it in the belly. It's funny . . . he's in a room next to Alfred Poore.”

Roper never changed the expression on his face, but after a pendant interval he said monotonously, “You been going places and doing things tonight, ain't you?”

“I've been getting around.”

“And seeing people.”

Donahue thinned his eyes. “Well, what's eating you, master mind?”

“There's a jane in the show. You know so much. Where's the jane?”

“I wouldn't know. Alfred's a secretive little guy. He got tougher too when he heard Babe wasn't dead.”

Roper's lips opened slowly. “Secretive like you, eh? You knew a hell of a lot more than you told me.”

“I gave you a straight story, Roper. Adler, the houseman, was there to check up. . . . Hell, do you suppose I'm going to let you in on a brainstorm I get?”

“Remember, Irish, it don't pay to crack bright with the precinct boys.”

Donahue placed a forefinger against Roper's chest. “Remember, Roper, it doesn't pay to get tough on a guy was in on the ground floor. Alfred and this Babe guy are tight-mouthed.”

“There's always the rubber-hose short-cut.”

Donahue grinned. “Be seeing you, Roper.”

Roper gripped Donahue's arm. “Suppose we sit down and you tell me the story from beginning to end.”

Donahue reached around his right hand and closed it on Roper's wrist. “Suppose,” he said, “you go over to the Twenty-first Precinct and read the blotter.” He threw down Roper's hand.

Roper's face remained inanimate, but he said, “Someday you'll be sorry, Irish.”

Donahue walked past him saying, “That sounds like the words to a song I once heard.” He kept on walking, went out through the hospital door.

He walked a block west on Twenty-sixth Street and hailed a taxi that was drifting north on Second Avenue. He said, “Run me over to Broadway and Thirty-second Street.” When he settled in the seat he yawned, stretched arms and legs, looked at the illuminated dial of his strap watch. It was three a.m.

Broadway was a deserted canyon when he alighted. Herald Square, by day a seething whirlpool of traffic, was empty and silent now. Donahue walked south, his footfalls clear-cut on the pavement. Dirty snow lay in the gutters.

He turned into the lobby of the Hotel Breton Arms. His heels rang on the tiled floor. A small bald man leaned on the ornate desk reading a paper. Donahue walked to the elevators. A sleepy Negro in a red uniform got up and walked into the elevator behind Donahue. When the elevator started Donahue said, “Ten.” The Negro snapped gum with tongue and teeth. Donahue got out at the tenth floor, turned left, looked at numbers on doors. He drew a key with a brass tag from his pocket. It clinked in his hand. The oval-shaped tag said:

THE

HOTEL

BRETON ARMS

He walked on smooth green carpets, turned left, walked a matter of ten yards and stopped before a door on which the number 1046 was printed in dull gold. He stepped back and looked up at a wooden-transom that was open about six inches. No light issued.

Donahue inserted the key quietly, turned it quietly, then gripped the knob and turned it slowly to the right.

## Six Deadly Dames

Presently the door gave inward. He opened it wide, so that the light from the corridor spread into the room, revealed the corner of a green carpet and the legs of a chair. He found a button on the wall inside the door frame. He pressed it and the room lit up.

Irene lay on the bed in canary yellow pajamas. Her legs were spread, each foot tied to a corner of the bed by means of narrow but strong luggage straps. Her arms were tied similarly to the posts at the head of the bed, and a towel was fastened around her mouth.

Donahue said, "Well!" jocularly, closed the door, unbuttoned his raglan and came over to sit on the side of the bed.

Irene's eyes were wide, frightened. She moved her head from side to side. Wrinkles appeared and disappeared on her forehead.

Donahue chuckled, reached around to the back of her neck and unfastened the towel. When he took that off there was a rag stuffed in Irene's mouth. He drew that out and threw it on the floor.

Irene exhaled, "Whew!"

Donahue said, "Nice pajamas you wear, Irene."

"Oh, God!" she moaned, straining at the luggage straps. "Get these things off! They hurt."

"They won't hurt if you lie still. Besides, I remember that clout on the head: . . . Irene, you and I are going to have a very short conversation. First, let me tell you that Babe Delaney is in the hospital with a bullet in his guts. Alfred, that nice-faced little doggie, is in the same hospital with a bullet in his leg. Alfred got Babe. I got Alfred."

She grimaced, showing her white small teeth.

Donahue went on, "The bulls have Alfred for the Delaney shoot and it won't be long before they pin the Crosby kill on one of them. . . . It wasn't very nice, Irene, the way you helped put Babe on the spot."

"I didn't——"

"Ah——ah!" Donahue held up his forefinger, shook it. "I happened to be listening in when you telephoned him." She cried, "I was made to do it! Alfred stood right there with a razor held under my throat. I had to, Donahue——I swear to God I had to!"

"You little double-crosser, you were playing both ends against the middle! You were jockeying both Alfred and Babe!"

She closed her eyes, bit her lip, whimpered, "Oh . . . God!"

Donahue leaned across the bed, braced on two rigid arms, one on either side of Irene's waist. His brown eyes smoldered.

"You don't have to act around me, Irene," he said. "You'll get on better by coming across. The bulls have Babe and Alfred, and they're both red-hots. The houseman down in Waverly Place saw Babe come in. I saw Alfred there and I saw you' there. I'm the only one knows where you are. I want the whole story from you."

"What good would that do?"

He said quietly, "It will help you a lot. You've got looks. I've got a pull in the city, and the tabloids can run you up on the sob stuff. If you don't play ball with me, I'll land on you like a ton of brick."

"Oh, I've been a fool!"

"If you only wouldn't pull those stock lines, Irene!"

Her voice throbbed when she cried, "I mean it!"

"Bah! You laid the trap for Crosby——"

"That's a lie!" she shouted.

Donahue rose, crossed to the door and closed the transom. He came back to the bed eyeing her whimsically. "Then are you going to tell me why it's a lie?"

Her eyes narrowed. "How do I know you can give me a break?"

"You can find out by not telling me things."

"Why——why do you want to know?"

"I'm a private cop. I work for a salary. I get a bonus on big jobs I turn. Crosby's uncle offered to pay the Agency ten thousand dollars. I get the bonus by getting to the core of things before the cops do. That's the whole shebang in a nut-shell."

She considered him for a moment. Then she said, "The trouble is, you don't believe I loved Crosby."

"All right. . . . I'll believe you loved him."

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“You say that easily.”

“Maybe I'll be able to say it easier after you've told me things.”

She sighed brokenly, moistened her lips. She looked at the ceiling and said, “I did love him. He loved me. I met him on the boat train from Paris to Cherbourg. Alfred and I were traveling as brother and sister. We were only two days out when Robert told me he loved me. Alfred never loved me. We weren't like that to each other. We just—— traveled together, for reasons.

“Alfred was bringing home a diamond he'd lifted from a woman— at Cannes. It was worth about seventy thousand dollars. It was set in a platinum medallion, a pendant sort of thing. We got to Paris with it. We got the stone out of the platinum medallion, threw everything away but the I stone.

“When we were three days out of Cherbourg, Alfred began to get one of his hunches. He was sure the Customs would pick it up. He browbeat me into planting it on Robert. I did. I didn't want to, though. I told Alfred how I felt about Robert, and he scoffed——just as you've been scoffing. He threatened to expose me if I didn't do as he said. I was afraid of the inevitable. I planted it on Robert. I worked it into one of his paint tubes, one that had been half used, with the bottom rolled up like you roll up a tube of toothpaste. I unrolled it, slit it, worked the diamond up into the paint and then re-rolled it.”

“Where does Babe Delaney come in?”

“Oh . . . Babe.” She sighed. “He was Robert's bootlegger. The first day Robert was home he called Babe up, and Babe went down to see him. He saw a photograph of me lying on the table there——one Robert had taken on board ship. Robert remarked it was a picture of Leone Tenquist. Babe said nothing to him. He came to me and asked what my racket was. I told him it wasn't anything. He said maybe I'd tell him or he'd tell Robert how things stood. Alfred and I had to let Babe in. We promised him ten thousand on sale of the diamond.

“Robert gave me a key to his flat. He said he'd be busy for a few days but that I could drop in any old time. I went down and looked for the tube of paint. I couldn't find it. I told Alfred I couldn't find it. He accused me of a double-cross. I swore I was telling the truth. Then Babe came, and when he heard the story he accused both of us. I told both of them the exact description of the tube of paint.”

“Babe went down last night to look himself. He was: tearing the place apart when Robert came in. Babe must have picked the lock. He did a two year stretch ten years ' ago for picking locks. He turned out the lights, but Robert went after him in the dark. Robert was pretty strong. Babe had to use a claspknife.——”

“Alfred stole the key I had to Robert's flat. He went down. He was there when you arrived. I went down when I'd discovered my key was gone. It's the truth, the God's honest truth! I couldn't get out of the racket. I tried to. I meant to after I'd gotten the diamond. I was going to let Alfred and Babe split. I was crazy about Robert.”

“And what happened to the diamond?”

“Gone. Robert had cleaned up, thrown out a lot of rubbish. The diamond went that way. Nobody got it.”

Donahue began untying the straps that held Irene's feet. “You have nice little feet,” he said.

“Please——don't ridicule me!”

He said, “Irene, that's a swell story and it rings true. I'll repeat it word for word to the bulls. You were a girl trying to go straight, but they had you in the toils of sin. Great? . . . Sure! I'll boost your story fifty per cent by saying that it was you put me on the trail of Babe Delaney.”

She gasped, “Oh ... not that!”

“Irene,” he said, untying her hands, “you want to save your skin. Babe Delaney muscled in. He was a punk. You want a fresh start in life——”

“You're ridiculing me!”

“I promise you the sweetest sob story ever told, Irene. You may even get a run in vaudeville . . . but you've got to tell the cops that Babe Delaney carved Crosby. That's your big and only way——out into God's country. . . . But why did Alfred smoke the Babe?”

“He was sure that if he didn't Babe would get him.”

Donahue stood up, smiled down at Irene. “Crosby knew a looker when he saw one, honey.”

Irene started to cry into her hands.

Donahue went towards the telephone saying, “Well, it's the least I can do for Roper.”

IX

WHEN THE DOOR OPENED Roper stood there with his dour face and his lazy big eyes. Donahue said, grinning, "You must come in." Roper walked in hunching his shoulders in his threadbare coat. He looked at Irene. She was standing with her back to the bureau. She looked very small and very lovely in a black dress that clung snugly to neat hips. Donahue closed the door and Roper stared at Irene with his big dispassionate eyes.

He said dully, "So you're the moll in the case."

"I wouldn't call her a moll," Donahue said.

Roper did not look around at Donahue but he said, "Keep your oar out of it, Donahue."

Then he walked heavily to the bureau, gripped Irene's arm.

"You look like the kind," he said. "You look like the kind I like to get nasty with."

Donahue put in, "Why, Roper, because a good-looking jane would never give you a tumble?"

Roper turned somberly. "You looking for a punch in the jaw?"

Donahue snarled, "Ah, grow up, copper. Keep that stuff for the coked wops you're used to slapping. I gave you a break. This little pinch is yours but you've got to handle it right. This girl steered me onto Babe Delaney for the Crosby kill. You've got the guy killed him. Why pick on the ladies?"——.;

Roper looked at Irene. "You say Babe killed Crosby?"

She faltered, "Ye-es." He shook her arm brutally. "Why the hell didn't you come to the police?"

Donahue said, "She thought I was a real copper, Roper. When I told her dick——I didn't say private. She and Crosby were in love. She's sidestepped a bit, but she was trying for a straight and these bums got in her way. You can see she's a good woman."

"Don't kid me, Donahue."

"I wouldn't kid you, Roper."

Roper dropped Irene's arm. His eyes hung somberly on Donahue. He said, after a minute. "Okey, Irish. You're a fast worker. If I was a younger cop, and ambitious, I might get God-awful sore. But I'm retiring soon. I'm used to routine." He turned to Irene. "Get your things on, sister."

Irene put on her mole coat and the dark cloche hat. Roper opened the door and waited in the hall. Irene went out. Donahue went out, snapped off the lights, closed and locked the door. He gave the key to Irene.

They were silent going down in the elevator. When they passed out into Broadway Roper said:——:

"We'll take a cab down if you'll pay the fare, Donahue."

## Get A Load Of This

THE HOCKSHOP was on Fourteenth Street, east of Union Square. It was about the width of a railway coach, and half the length. The window was littered with cheap novelties. The interior was dark and gloomy. Behind the showcase a man sat at a high desk and regarded the insides of a wristwatch beneath a bright green–visored light whose concentrated radiance did not extend beyond the desk.

Donahue kicked the screen door open, walked in casually, and the screen door banged behind him. He drifted down the length of a beam of spring sunlight that came in through the door. He wore a neat pepper–colored suit, a gray soft hat, and he smoked a straight–stemmed shell briar.

He leaned indolently on the counter and said, “Hello, Mr. Friedman.”

The man got down from the high stool and approached the back of the counter. He was small, slim, with a young–old sallow face, horn–rimmed glasses, black curly hair. “What can I do for you?”

Irony was in Donahue’s crooked slow smile. “Remember me?”

Friedman did not look Donahue in the eye, but he said, “No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

“Well, don’t be afraid.” Donahue drew his hand from his pocket and laid a large diamond on the showcase. “Then maybe you remember this.”

Friedman’s eyes riveted on the stone. Lines appeared on his forehead. “I can’t say I do.”

“Ah, cut out the horseplay, Friedman. Sure you remember it. And you remember me. A guy named Bonalino hocked it here a month ago. I came in with him when he took it out. You said at the time that you would give him eight hundred for it any time he wanted to sell it.”

“I said that?”

“You said that.”

Friedman shrugged. “Maybe I did. I can’t remember everybody comes in here. A lot of people hock things here.”

“That diamond,” Donahue said incisively, “isn’t worth eight hundred. Not seven. Not six. At best it’s worth four hundred, which means that your top price would be two. Now when Bonalino hocked it you gave him two hundred and fifty bucks——”

“Say, who are you?”

“I’m a private dick. You remember me now?”

“Sure I remember you now.”

“Okey. How’s to come across?”

Friedman frowned. “But I don’t get what you’re driving at.”

“Your brain’s not as lame as that. I’ll tell you what I’m driving at. The diamond that Bonalino hocked here was worth ninety thousand bucks. You duplicated it with this hunk of cheap ice. Bonalino doesn’t know a diamond from a good hunk of crystal. You knew that much. When he came back here with me to get his ice, you gave him this.”

Friedman laughed. “Ah, be yourself, guy!”

“I’m being myself, sweetheart. We’ve got a letter from the Anglo–Continental Indemnity Company, of London and Geneva. They’re looking for that hunk of ice, and this is not it.”

“I don’t get you at all.”

Donahue wagged his finger. “Listen. A guy name Alfred Poore and a jane named Irene Saffarrans brought the diamond over here from France. Poore lifted it from a dowager duchess in Cannes this winter past. Coming over, the jane planted it on an artist named Crosby. They were afraid of the Customs. Crosby got knifed to death by a guy named Babe Delaney, who made Poore and the Saffarrans jane let him in on the racket. He’d found things out. Poore gunned for Delaney and I got Poore and they sent him to the Big House. Nobody concerned got the ice. “It turned out that the ice had been planted in one of Crosby’s hats, and when he got home Crosby gave his janitor, a guy named Adler, some old clothes——among them the hat. The Saffarrans jane got clear after Poore went up, and she hooked up with a guy named Bruhard. Bruhard bumped off Adler in Grove Street, got the hat but not the diamond. Adler had got the hat cleaned. Bonalino worked in the hat–cleaning store, and when he took the lining

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out he found the ice. He hocked it here. Bruhard got gunned out in Forty-second Street, the jane got ten years. Nobody concerned got the real ice. Do you get me now?"

"No, I don't. I loaned Bonalino two-fifty on this diamond. He paid me two-fifty and got the diamond back. That's all I know, and you can believe it or lump it."

Donahue's voice rose—"I don't believe it and I'm not going to lump it!"

"Listen, master-mind." Friedman leaned on the counter and laid narrowed eyes on Donahue. "I don't know what your game is, but it's not on the up and up. I don't know what the hell you're talking about, and I don't have to carry on a conversation with you. Why don't you get a brainwave and take the air?"

Donahue got interested. "So you've decided to get tough, eh? Trying to brazen it out, eh? Well, pipe this, sweetheart: It won't work. That diamond was worth ninety thousand bucks till it reached here. Do you want to play house with me or do you want me to go to Headquarters and tell what I know? They don't know that Bonalino hocked it. They think he had it in his possession from the beginning. I kept back the news to clear Bonalino."

"Go to Headquarters."

"Yeah? You keep books, you know. You're supposed to enter every article pawned here. You know that, don't you?"

"Sure." Friedman swung a ledger on to the counter, flipped the pages, stopped, turned the ledger around so that Donahue could read it, and laid a finger on an entry.

"There it is. I valued it wholesale at eight hundred. I loaned two-fifty on it. My books are okey. Go to Headquarters."

Donahue looked up at him, smiled without humor. "Your brain's not lame, Friedman——not at all."

"There it is——in black and white."

"Okey. But I don't believe everything I read. Be seeing you some more, baby."

Donahue went out wearing a sultry look that was not without chagrin.

Asa Hinkle, the Interstate in person, looked up from his flat-topped desk when Donahue entered and said:

"You look down-hearted, Donny, my boy."

Donahue paced the floor a turn or two, scowling. He was baffled, and now that he was away from unfriendly eyes, his manner showed it. "That guy Friedman wasn't born yesterday."

"Oh, that's it!"

"I felt like caving in his mug."

"Only a city dick can do that——and get away with it. What did he say?"

"Nothing worth a damn. He made the entry in his book okey. The guy's solid and he knows it. He valued it at eight hundred. If anybody argues he can say *that* was what he valued it at. There's no proof he had the real diamond. No proof at all. It's changed hands so much that anyone might have fluked it."

He dropped the bogus stone on the desk. "I guess you cab let the Police Commissioner have it back. It didn't work."

Hinkle took off his diplomatic pince-nez. "That diamond must be in America, Donny. Poore and the Saffarrans woman know stones. They wouldn't have tried to bring in a fluke."

Donahue squinted. "What do you want me to do——go down and see Friedman again, get him in the back room and punch him around until the yellow runs? I'll do it! By God, I'll do it!"

His dark eyes glittered, his fists were rocks at his sides.

Hinkle smiled, shook his head. "Donny, don't be so thoroughly Irish."

Donahue turned away, growled, "That's an old one of yours!"

## Six Deadly Dames

### II

DONAHUE WAS EATING ravioli in an Italian speak in West Tenth Street at noon the next day when Libbey, a city press association reporter fell in through the door, picked himself up and headed for the bar in the rear.

“Some day you’ll knock your brains out,” Donahue called.

“Oh, hello, Donny.”

Libbey changed his course, came over and flopped down in a chair facing Donahue. Drink had sapped the color in his cheeks. Drink had given him that young–old face. The crown of his hat was dented in, and his tie was crooked against his collar. He reached for the bottle of red wine beside Donahue, poured a water–glass full, swallowed it without a pause. He smacked his lips.

“How’s the ravioli?”

“How’s the wine?”

“I don’t like wine. . . . Hey, Skinny, bring me a Bacardi cocktail, and I don’t mean rosewater. . . . Well, wine is all right, Donny, if there is nothing else but water around. I feel depressed. That louse Sweeney is God’s most ungrateful man. I telephone him immediately after the murder happens and what does he do but wisecrack and accuse me of being drunk. I’m going to throw the job and get down to writing a novel.

“Who got gunned out?”

“A fellow gave pennies and baubles to little kiddies. It’s a shame, Donny.”

“Around here?”

“Fourteenth Street.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“Yeah. A hockshop man, Friedman.”

Donahue looked up. “How’d it happen?”

“Nobody knows. Some guy just came in, apparently, and blew him apart and went away, taking with him some loot —possibly. At any rate, there was a chamois gem bag on the floor near the pool of blood.”

“What time?”

“About eleven, I guess. . . . If you could see the pool of blood——”

“What’s the cop on the job think?”

“Who . . . Roper?”

“Roper on it?”

“Yeah. Great mind, that Roper . . . for a moron. Well, what the hell could he think? What do I think? What does anybody think? Look now: Murder and robbery, of course. But of an odd nature. There is the chamois bag lying beside the pool of blood. But it appears that the safe was not rifled and nothing stolen from it. Then what? Well, either the chamois bag was flung down in disgust by the murderer–thief, or it was discarded after he had taken something out of it. In the latter case, it’s plausible to assume——to assume that Friedman had something shady in his possession. What was it? Who knows? Ah, my son, that is the mystery. . . . Well, it’s about time, Skinny!”

Libbey tipped the Bacardi cocktail against his lips and drained it at two swallows. “*Encore*, Skinny. . . . How’s to, Donny?”

“No, thanks. And what does Roper think exactly? Did he figure things out that way?”

“No. God, no! Roper? Pardon me if I seem to chortle. . . . How’s the ravioli?”

“Fine.”

“Think I’ll have some spaghetti. By the way, I kidded our friend Roper a bit. I said to him, quite offhand, ‘If you find it hard, Roper, look up Donahue.’ You should have seen him! And do you know what he said? He said, ‘When–; ever I look that palooka up, it’ll be to put bracelets on him.’ I said bracelets were kind of effeminate; you might object. He spit on the floor, showing how he was brought——or dragged——up. . . . Gripes, Skinny, you take long! A guy would think this belly–wash was custom made.” Donahue paid his check and got up.

“So soon?” Libbey asked.

“I’ve got places to go.” Before he left the speak, however, he made a telephone call. “Hello, Ames? . . . Listen,

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Billy. This is Donahue. . . . I'm Jake. Say, can you meet me in Fritz's in fifteen minutes? . . . Oh, something. I'll tell you then. . . . Great, Billy!"

When Donahue stepped from the booth there was a hard smile on his face. He walked briskly to a subway station and walked impatiently for a northbound train. His manner was eager and alert. He was smiling when he went down into a basement speakeasy on Thirty-sixth street.

Ames was standing at the bar. He was a medium-sized man, blond, casual, smiling. "Hello, Donny." He was lazy-voiced.

"Listen, Billy. D'you hear about that kill in Fourteenth Street?"

"Yeah. We got it over the precinct. Mob job, eh?"

"I wouldn't know. There's a possibility it wasn't. Want to do something for me?"

"Any time."

"Find out who was released from Sing Sing recently, and if any of the guys was a cell-mate of Alfred Poore."

"That all, Donny?"

"That's all."

"Have a drink?"



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### III

DONAHUE HAD BATHED and was on his way out for dinner that night when the telephone rang. He went back to answer it.

“Yeah, this is Donahue. . . . Oh, hello, Roper. What's on your mind? . . . Oh, you do? Well, I'm going out to eat. . . . It can wait, can't it? Okey. I'll drop in.”

He hung up, stood for a long moment with the telephone in his hand. Then he put it down, looked a little puzzled, and went out.—'

Roper was sitting in the back room of the station-house.

Madden, his partner, and another dick named Crowley, were with him, and none of them smiled. Crowley closed the door, and Roper creaked his swivel chair. He drew a letter from his pocket, held it out.

“Read it, Donahue.”

Donahue took the letter, spread it and found it to be a note written on I. Friedman's business stationery. It said:

*Dear Benny:*

*Business is not so good, but that seems to be the case all around. I can lend you a hundred till the first, but I've got to have it back then.*

*My back is a little better, and I guess I'll be all right soon. Nothing has happened, except a visit yesterday by a fly cop named Donahue. He threatened me, but I laughed that off.*

*Don't forget I've got to have that century back by the first.*

—'.—*Ike.*

Donahue said, “H'm,” handed the letter back and added, “What do you make of it, Roper?”

Roper wore a dull, inimical look. “I'll turn that question right around at you.”

“And we still don't get an answer,” Donahue said. “Don't we?”

Donahue looked at him with wide-open brown eyes. “What's this——another indication of your sense of humor?” Roper's gaunt jaw shifted. “Why did you threaten Friedman?”

“Did I threaten Friedman?”

Roper stood up, a bony man with wide, stooped shoulders, hard wrists and big-knuckled hands. “You read this letter, didn't you? This guy Friedman wrote to his brother, and he wrote you threatened him.”

“It doesn't say I threatened his life, does it?”

“It says you threatened him.”

“All right. I threatened to bust him in the face. What about it, copper?”

“Why did you threaten to bust him in the face?”

“It was personal. I lost my temper.” Madden came up behind Donahue and gripped his arms. Roper said, “Come on, Donahue. Why did you threaten him?”

Red color began to creep into Donahue's face. “You guys going to get rough?”

“I'm waiting for an answer,” Roper said.

“Then tell this mutt to take his hands off me!”

“Let him go, Madden.”

Madden stepped back.

Roper said, “Okey, Donahue. Now tell me.”

“I've told you. It's my business, and if you're dumb enough to think I'm mixed up in this job, arrest me!”

Madden grabbed him again, twisting his arms behind his back. Donahue's brown eyes got humid, and his lip curled, a dark shadow swept down across his forehead, across his face, making the red there dull and malignant.

Roper said, “I want to know what you were doing in that guy's store yesterday. This letter wasn't mailed. We found it in his store. He must have written it this morning. You've got to come across, Donahue.”

“Not on your natural, Roper,” Donahue snapped. “Arrest me. Go ahead. Nothing would tickle me more, because I'd be out in a couple of hours and you'd be the laughing stock of the whole neighborhood. You can't buffalo me, sweetheart. Try it on the kids you slap for pitching pennies in the back alleys.”

Roper took one forward step and laid the flat of his hard hand across Donahue's face. Donahue kicked Roper in

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the shins and Roper fell down. Madden butted Donahue with his knee. Crowley punched Donahue in the short ribs, and Donahue, cursing, kicked sidewise at Crowley while Madden still held his arms locked behind.

Roper was getting up, his upper lip lifted wolf-like.

Donahue said hotly, "You know damned well you can't arrest me! What you want, you cheap punk, is to find out what I know about Friedman! You're using this letter as a buffer. But it only gives me a laugh. Go ahead——arrest me! Why don't you?"

"Let him go, Madden." Roper's face was sombre, his voice a low growl.

Madden stepped back. Donahue smoothed down his sleeves, turned and headed for the door. Madden stepped in his way.

Donahue said, "You're another dick needs a bust in the mouth."

"Why don't you bust it?"

Roper raised his voice——"Get out, Donahue."

Donahue yanked the door open, threw a contemptuous look at Madden, at Roper, and Crowley; laughed sarcastically and went out with a toss of his chin.

Four nights out of each week Donahue ate dinner at Dominick's, a quiet joint where you got good chili con carne and Spanish sherry that wasn't cut but once. This was one of the four nights. Dominique was the real name, but the neighborhood was more or less Italian, and Dom himself had lived much in Genoa; and besides, the guy who'd painted the sign that hung over the narrow door was a Baxter Street Italian with a one-track mind.

It was near Columbus Park, on the Baxter Streetside. It had a few booths in the rear room——the restaurant comprised two large rooms——and some lattice-work beneath the ceiling entangled with imitation vines.

Donahue found his favorite booth empty and after he'd told the waiter to bring him a Martini, Dom came over all smiling with a lot of big white teeth.

"Lady lookin' for you, Donny."

"Yeah?" Donahue laughed, broke a bread-stick. "It's happened before."

Dominick indicated a brunette who sat alone at a table in the opposite corner.

"She doesn't know me," Donahue said.

"Mebbe not. She justa ask you come here and I say sure, lots."

Donahue said, "Okey. Let her sit there. I don't want to know her."

Dominick looked puzzled. The waiter brought the Martini, and Donahue tried it, gave his order. The brunette didn't eat. She was drinking gin rickies, from time to time. Donahue spent an hour over his meal, winding up with black coffee and a tot of brandy. He paid his bill, got up and on the way out stopped to touch Dominick's shoulder.

"Remember, Dom,. I haven't been in."

"I getcha. Sure."

Donahue walked out and crossed the street, stopped at the corner and waited. He waited half an hour. Finally the girl came out and walked towards him on the opposite side of the street. She was tall, had a loose-limbed walk that was not ungraceful.

He tailed her until she reached a corner where three cabs stood at the curb. She got in the first and drove off. Donahue got in the second and said:

"Tail that jane, bud."

The tail led to Julie's in West Tenth Street, and when Donahue entered the bar he could see the girl sitting at a table in the back room. A waiter was taking her order, and when the waiter came into the bar he saw Donahue and started to open his mouth.

Donahue cut in with, "Is that jane looking for me?"

"Yeah, Donny. She just——". "Tell her you haven't seen me here in weeks." Donahue had a beer and was finishing it when the girl got up and left. He went out a minute later and saw her walking east. She turned into Gay Street and struck Waverly Place. Familiar neighborhood for Donahue. Here Crosby had met his death at the hands of Babe Delaney. Here he had first seen Irene Saffarrans and Alfred Poore, the nice-faced rat. Here he had seen Adler——who later got smoked out in Grove Street.

The girl entered a four-story graystone near Sixth Avenue. Donahue crossed the street and watched the building. Lights on first and third floors were glowing. Two minutes later Donahue saw two windows on the left

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light up. He saw the form of the girl in one of the windows for a brief moment, before she pulled the shade down. She lived on the third floor. While she was reaching up to draw down the shade on the other window Donahue saw a man in a bathrobe stretching and yawning. Then the drawn shade hid both.

After a minute Donahue crossed the street, got the number of the house, and walked to Sixth Avenue, turned north and then east into Eighth Street.

When he entered his hotel there was a letter in the box. It was on the hotel stationery.

The clerk said, "A man came in at about eight, asked for you and I said you'd gone out. He wrote a note and said I should be sure to give it to you."

"Thanks."

Donahue walked away, stopped, tore open the letter. It was from Ames.

*Dear Donny:*

*Tubba Klem finished a five-year stretch last Tuesday. He was Poore's cell mate. Luck. And don't forget yours truly.—Billy.*

Donahue walked to a large earthen ash receptacle, tore the note into fragments, dropped them on the butt-littered sand, and entered the elevator wearing a puzzled frown.

The man he had seen yawning and stretching was not Tubba Klem.

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### IV

WHO WAS the woman? . . .

“Never saw her before,” Donahue said.

“That’s queer,” Hinkle said. “Funny, too, that when Dom said a girl was asking for you, you didn’t get right up and fall right down for her.”

“What am I supposed to do, laugh?” Donahue leaned back in the chair.

“If the man I’d seen was Tubba Klem I’d bite. But he wasn’t, and I haven’t the slightest use for that sort of a woman. They mean trouble every time and all the time and no foolin’.”

Hinkle sighed. “Well, we won’t go into that. . . . And Roper started a third degree on you, eh?”

“Yeah. And he’s got a flatfoot tailing me now.” Donahue stood up, strolled to the window. “He’s holding a pole up now. Some rookie.” He came back and stood by the desk, staring abstractedly at its hard, shiny surface. “And the guy wasn’t Tubba Klem. He was a big guy, plenty of muscle, and light hair. At a glance, I’d say I’d” never seen him before. The jane and the guy must be strangers in town.”

The telephone rang. Hinkle answered it, then shoved it across the desk. “For you, Donny.”

Donahue picked it up, said, “Hello. . . . Yeah, this is Donny. . . . Huh? . . . I get you. . . . Sure. Okey, kid.” He hung up and put the telephone back on the desk. “One of my little stoolies. I know where Tubba Klem is. Tubba has come out of stir with a he–man complex. He’s packing two big guns.” He put or? his hat.

Hinkle’s face became grave. “I wouldn’t get a two–gun man’s goat, Donny.”

Donahue laughed. He slipped his– right hand beneath his left arm, drew out a long–barreled blue automatic. “Take a look at that, Asa.” He laid it on the desk and smiled at Hinkle.

“Hell, man, it’s only a twenty–two!”

“Ten shots, hollow–point. The best balanced gun a man can buy, and one little slug will do the trick. When a guy packs two big guns, it means to me that he’s a punk shot and figures on dynamiting his way out.”

He picked up the slim automatic, slipped it into the sheath beneath his arm. He took a look through the window. “First,” he said, “I’ll have to shake the rookie.”

He went out and walked down Park Row to Broadway. He hopped a northbound Broadway street car, and saw the rookie climb into a taxi behind. The taxi followed the street car, though it had plenty of opportunity to pass it. Donahue rode as far as Worth Street, alighted and dodged traffic to the west side of Broadway, then strode west on Worth Street. The taxi passed him, and the rookie got off at the corner of Worth and Church. Donahue turned north on Church. The rookie was drifting along behind.

Donahue turned west into Franklin Street, walked one block and went down into the West Side Subway kiosk. A train was standing in the station. Donahue ducked into the toilet. He waited until the train had drawn out, then pushed the door open and stood behind the turnstiles. He saw no one. He dropped a nickel in the slot and a minute later caught a northbound local. He changed to a Bronx Park express at Fourteenth Street, saw no sign of the rookie.

Harlem was sunning itself. The spring afternoon held promise of an early summer. Little kids—three of them—sat half naked in a doorway from which issued the sound of something frying and the smell of that which was being fried. Two doors farther on a couple of tough–looking bucks leaned against a dirty store–window that had the word Pool painted on it.

Donahue passed the smelly doorway, and slowed down as he approached the pool parlor. A hall–door was ajar just beyond the big window. It indicated regions above the pool layout. Donahue pushed the door open, left it open, so that bright sunlight followed him in. He stood inside, body twisted, eyes slanted at the door. After a minute he looked up the wooden staircase.

He climbed it. The soles of his shoes made loose boards creak, and the banister wobbled when he leaned against it. On the first landing a door opened and a girl came out humming. She was high–yellow, had pretty teeth and flashing black eyes. It was the perfume Donahue didn’t like. “How yuh, mistuh big boy?”

“Yeah,” said Donahue, and went on up the next staircase.

He paused at the top. The girl’s heels were rapping down the stairs below. Donahue climbed a third staircase,

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stood at the top counting doors. Then he walked past three doors, stopped before the fourth. He knocked. He waited a minute and knocked again.

Then he took a bunch of keys from his pocket. He chose one of three master keys. It worked. He entered swiftly, closed the door and locked it.

The room was small, with one window looking out on a backyard and a panorama of roofs, clothes-lines and garbage cans, rusty fire-escapes and skeins of radio aerials.

The room itself had a cot salvaged from some army and navy store. Two chairs, one with a broken cane bottom. A washstand with speckled stone top, a bowl and a pitcher. An imitation-leather suitcase, new, lay on the floor. A dirty shirt lay on the bed, along with a pair of socks. The drawer of a cheap bureau was open, revealing one clean shirt.

Donahue pulled the two other drawers out. They were empty. He looked under the clean shirt. Nothing. He tackled the suitcase. There were two bottles of High-and-Dry in it, buried among more dirty clothes. He searched the clothes, making a face. Finally he closed the suitcase, stood up and let his eyes roam around. He crossed to the washstand, opened the door beneath the mottled top. Closed it. He drew his lower lip sidewise beneath his upper teeth, scowled reflectively, while his keen eyes stabbed the room in a dozen places. As a matter of form he turned the mattress over and searched the pillows. Nothing, of course. There was a pair of old brown shoes beneath the cot. He pulled them out, ran his hand inside each. He threw them down, disgruntled. One turned over on its side.

The sun, driving one slim rapier of brilliance into the room, made something shine on the sole of the shoe. Donahue knelt down. Gum soles. He held the shoe in his left hand, took a penknife 'with his right, pried out the shiny little object. He carried it to the window. He smiled—— grimly, intimately.

He went to the door, unlocked it. He took one of the two chairs and placed it against the wall beside the window. He opened the window and looked down. A fire-escape led to the cluttered yard below. He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock. He dragged out his pipe, stuffed it and sat down on the chair facing the door. He lit up, and when the inside of the bowl was a red glow, he leaned back and crossed his arms on his chest, his right hand concealed by the upper part of his left arm. He hooked one heel on the edge of the bed.

At five a key grated in the lock. The door swung open and Tubba Klem rocked in. Stopped short. Drew up one side of his broad, fat nose and wrinkled his fat eyelids over rodent eyes.

“Should lock your door, Tubba, when you go out.”

“How'n hell'd you get in?”

“Door was open.”

“The hell it was!”

Donahue grinned. “Honest, Tubba. How the hell do you think I'd get in?”

Tubba Klem scowled with his huge apish face, kicked the door shut and scaled his hat on the bed. He had got a haircut in stir just before leaving. His head was shaped like one end of a watermelon, hairless, corrugated in the back. He had no eyebrows, but the bone above his eyes was craggy.

“What you want, Donahue? I know you!”

“go you've gone native, Tubba?”

“What you want? I said what you want?” His mouth was huge. His teeth were huge, and primordial fire burned in his crag-shaded eyes. A broad man, wide around the middle, wearing a misshapen coat. “You got a helluva nerve, comin' in here! What you want?” He stood on trunks of legs that were spread wide, mammoth feet rooted to the floor, outthrust jaw belligerent. The room seemed to have grown smaller since his entrance.

Donahue lounged on the chair, heel of his left foot still hooked on the edge of the bed. The surface of his brown eyes was whimsical. Deeper, there was a hawk-like watchfulness.

“Don't get steamed up, Tubba.”

Tubba Klem's scowl wavered. He looked almost sheepish. He laughed, shrugged, and drew a crumpled cigarette from his pocket. He lit up and dropped to the cot.

His tone was more amiable when he said, “What can I do for you, Donny?”

“I heard you were Poore's cell-mate.”

“Yeah.”

“I fixed him for that ride. I was wondering how he's getting on. He wasn't a bad guy.”

Tubba Klem shuttered his eyes, dropped his thick lower lip so that his lower teeth appeared. For a brief

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moment he looked oafish. Then he said, "Oh, yeah, Al's okey."

"Hear he's trying to get another trial."

"Well, maybe. Guess he is maybe. I dunno."

"He needs jack; that's what he needs."

Tubba Klem steadied his eyes. He was thinking hard. The effort made wrinkles on his forehead. Donahue was eying him slyly. Tubba Klem looked up at him a little baffled, a little suspicious. Donahue smiled. Tubba Klem dropped his eyes, jerking them back and forth across the floor. Then he scowled and looked up.

"What you drivin' at? What you want?" He heaved up, making great fists of his hands.—"I don't savvy you at all, Donahue! You go get to hell outta here!"

"Ah, calm down, Tubba. I don't want you. I just thought you might spring something about Poore's plans. Well," he got up, "I guess Poore held his trap. I just got a bum steer, Tubba."

"Well, see you stay outta here!"

"Sure. Don't get sore, Tubba. I'm wrong. I admit it." He grinned. "I always figured you got framed up the river last time. I'm sorry, Tubba."

Tubba Klem looked grieved. "Course I got framed. Ain't I tryin' like hell to get a job now? And here you gotta come snoopin' around."

Donahue held out his hand. "I'm sorry, kid. Shake."

Tubba Klem looked suspicious again. He put out his hand warily. Donahue shook it, dropped it, went to the door. He opened it, said, "The straight and narrow pays, Tubba. So long."

"So long, Donny."

Donahue entered the hockshop on Fourteenth Street at a quarter to six.

A youngish man, with pomaded black hair, looked up from a ledger.

"Hello," Donahue said.

"Hello," the man said.

"Are you running this place now?"

"Yeah."

"Ike's 'brother?'"

"Yeah."

"Benny?'"

"Sure."

Donahue smiled. "I'm Donahue."

"Yeah? You're the guy came in here the other day——"

"I'm the little boy. Now hold on, kid. Don't get hot and bothered. You'd like to find out who murdered your brother, wouldn't you?"

"What's that to you?"

"Maybe I can turn the trick. Now forget I was going to punch him in the jaw. I lost my temper, that's all. I'm sorry, too. You forget it and maybe we'll get somewhere." The man shrugged. "Go ahead: Spill it."

"Okey. When you came in here to open up, I suppose things were not in order. Was anything lying on the floor? I mean, was anything spilled?"

"As far as I can make out, nothing was swiped."

"I know. But was anything lying on the floor? Watch parts. Anything."

"Well, there was some parts scattered on the work desk in the back room."

"Let's look at 'em."

Benny grumbled, but led Donahue into the back room. He pointed to a tray. "These things were scattered on the desk. I put 'em back."

"What's this?"

"Lady's wristwatch. I guess Ike was fixing it."

"Yeah. All the parts here?"

Benny looked at a tag. "It needed a main spring."

"Is that all?"

"That's all it says."

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Donahue got down on his knees, lit a match and searched under the desk. Two fingers of his right hand slipped into his vest. Then he lit another match, searched some more, and finally stood up, asking:

“What's this?”

“Looks like a watch stem. Guess it belongs to that watch.”

Donahue picked up the small watch, inserted the stem. It fitted flush with the frame of the watch. He stood back, stroking his jaw.

“Well,” he said, “another blind alley, but worth a chance. Thanks, Benny.”——;

Outside, he hopped a taxicab. Fifteen minutes later he walked in on Asa Hinkle. Hinkle was putting on his hat.

“I see no blood, Donny.”

“Don't lose hope. I'm going to get a good meal under my belt and then I'm going after Tubba Klem.”

Hinkle dropped his smile. “That certain.”

“I dropped in Tubba's place this afternoon. He was out. I looked around and I found the smallest watch stem you ever saw. It was jammed in the gum sole of Tubba's spare shoes. Tubba came in and we talked about the weather. Then I went down to the hockshop. The stem fitted a watch there.”

“Listen, Donny; you'd better get a flock of cops——”

“No! They'll blow him apart. I just want to put him out temporarily.”

“For God's sake, Donny, that guy's a killer!”

“That's tabloid talk, boss. But if he gets me, here's his address.” He bent over the desk, writing.

“Donny, it's suicide——”

“Said he hysterically.”

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### V

DONAHUE WENT TO the Italian joint in West Tenth Street for a spaghetti feed and a bottle of ink. He took on a whiskey sour at the bar, then went into the side room, saw Libbey, the journalistic drunk, in one corner and chose another. It was one of those times when Donahue wanted to be alone.

“Why the tall millinery?” yelled Libbey:

“Hello, Libbey.” Donahue spread a napkin, said to the waiter, “Spaghetti and the works.”

“Oke.”

“I always thought you were a conceited, high-hat——” yelled Libbey, good-naturedly.

“Oh-ho!” softly.

Donahue froze on his chair.

The woman again.

She sauntered through the door, passed Libbey's table and sat down at one six feet on his right. He eyed her with the dazed look of a sot. She was stunning in a dark cloche hat, a dark tailored suit and a white blouse with black vertical stripes.

Donahue was moving one leg from beneath the table, reaching with his right hand for his hat. The waiter came with a menu.

Donahue clipped, “Gus!”

The waiter came over, and Donahue muttered, “That jane's looking for me. She'll ask for me. Tell her I don't come in here.”

“Oke.”

She ordered a gin rickey.

Skinny came in with Libbey's Bacardi cocktail.

Gus stopped at Donahue's table. “She did. Oke.”

Donahue nodded.

At that auspicious moment the drunken Libbey again yelled across: “I say, brother Donahue, do you know class when you see it?”

Donahue dropped his eyes to the table, broke a breadstick.

The woman had started, was looking at him. Donahue kept his head down, frowning sourly.

The woman smiled, said, “Hello, Mr. Donahue.”

Donahue looked up. “Speak to me?”

She rose, moved her long legs slowly on the way over, sat down at his table and took one of his cigarettes.

“Got a light?”

“You see the matches, don't you?”

She chuckled. “Just a strong, silent man, eh?”

“I'm not in the habit of having stray broads sit at my table. Give your legs a walk, sister.”

“Is that a way to treat a lady?”

His nostrils twitched. “I know how to treat a lady.”

She blew smoke in his face, showed even white teeth in a droll smile. “I'll bet you bite when you're really mad.”

Donahue folded arms on the table, settled head between broad shoulders, bored the woman with unfriendly eyes.

“Get it off your chest and then take the air,” he clipped in a low, incisive voice.

“Why rush things, big boy?”

In the same incisive voice, “Do your song and dance or I'll call the boss in and tell him to throw you out. This speak is no port of call for your kind.”

“So you think I'm that kind?”

“I'll take the benefit of the doubt.” Looking at her, he suddenly became aware of the fact that her eyes were green.



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She said, offhand, "Oh, I want that diamond, Donahue. That's all."

"You also have a sense of humor," he said; laughed shortly and took his arms off the table as Gus swooped down with steaming dishes. Gus drew the cork on the bottle "of ink, flicked the woman with a sidelong glance, sighed, and shuffled off.

She said, "You switched stones, Donahue. You showed a fake to the police commissioner. Nobody switched stones but you."

"And you want it, eh?"

"I want it."

"Well, I haven't got it. And if I did have it——"

He chuckled and began eating. "On your way, girl scout."

Her green eyes narrowed. "Okey, wisenheimer. This means you're on the spot."

"Okey," Donahue said cheerfully.

She leaned back, still eying him shrewdly. "A split would be all right by me."

Donahue laid down his knife and fork. "I told you to take the air! By God, if you don't, I'll have you kicked out!"

She stood up, her nostrils quivering. Her green eyes blazed. She went out swiftly, her high heels rapping on the floor.

When Donahue came out of the speak into Tenth Street, his eyes swept up and down. He started off, turned into West Fourth Street and headed for Sheridan Square. He walked a bit gingerly, his dark eyes alert, darting from sidewalk to sidewalk and frequently back over his shoulder. He kept close to the shadows of the houses.

At Sheridan Square he entered the uptown subway kiosk, caught a local and changed to an express at the next station. He watched the people who entered behind him.

Harlem at night was no beauty spot. Donahue was a lean man striding purposefully through the seedier part of the Black Belt. Only this night's grim mission prevented him from having played along with the strange woman.

There was the familiar pool parlor, half a block ahead, on the other side of the street. The click of balls could be heard, and a man's harsh laughter. A few lighted windows straggled above the poolroom to the roof. A couple of Negro sheiks sauntered past swinging sticks, and whistling. Donahue crossed the street and was about to enter the hall-door when he heard heavy footsteps above. He stepped aside, walked rapidly away and melted into the recess between two dark-faced store windows. He saw Tubba Klem come out of the doorway and walk south. A minute later Donahue followed.

Tubba Klem turned three corners and then went down a dark street. Half way down the street was the *Black and Tan Club*. Tubba Klem entered beneath the blinking electric light sign. Donahue passed the club, walked a block, turned and came back. He entered the *Black and Tan*.

There was a smoke-filled lobby, black drapes covered with silver scrolls, and black men with white teeth, white stiff shirt fronts and natty tuxedos. There were dim lights with red globes, and a hat-check girl with dusky skin and marcelled hair. And the buzz of voices.

Donahue checked his hat and hung around in the lobby smoking until the jazzband cut loose. When he heard the shuffle of dancing feet, he drew aside the folds of the black-and-silver curtains and bumped into a huge black head-waiter. The head-waiter took him to a small table far removed from the dance-floor. Donahue ordered gin and ginger ale.

Through the shifting panorama of dancers he caught intermittent glimpses, of Tubba Klem sitting with a small beady-looking man with a big nose and a shiny bald pate. The little man was doing—most of the talking and all of the gesturing. Tubba Klem was grinning at a brown girl who sat at a long table with five other brown girls. When the dance was over, the crowd sat down, and Donahue had to bend sidewise to see Tubba Klem. He saw the small man get up petulantly and go to a table where a girl waited.

Tubba Klem was drinking. He drank out the space of four dances. Then got up and headed for the lobby. Donahue saw him pass through the curtains.

Donahue called the waiter and paid his check. He waited two minutes, then got up and went into the lobby. He saw the front door closing, caught a fleeting glimpse of Tubba Klem in profile. Donahue got his hat, went out and saw half a dozen persons getting out of a limousine. They wore evening wraps. He saw Tubba Klem walking away.

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When he had taken six steps, Donahue drew the long-barreled .22 from the sheath under his arm. He pushed the barrel into his pocket, keeping his hand on the butt. He walked rapidly, and was ten feet behind Tubba Klem when he turned in towards a doorway.

"Just a minute, Tubba," Donahue said quietly.

When Tubba Klem turned, Donahue was only five feet away from him——stopped. His hat was yanked down far over his eyes.

"Look here, Don——" Tubba Klem began.

"Shut up!"

"Damn you, Don——"

"Walk a bit, Tubba."

"Say, what the hell——"

"Get!"

Tubba Klem's hands went in towards his sides.

Donahue drew his automatic. "I said, Tubba——walk a bit."

"——Dam you——you——" But Tubba Klem began walking.

Donahue walked at his side, a foot clear of him, half a foot behind.

"Don't hurry, Tubba. . . . Now, listen: Have you an alibi as to where you were at ten-thirty Tuesday morning?"

"What the hell's it gotta do with you?"

"Slower. There's no hurry. . . . I know you haven't got an alibi. You killed Ike Friedman, the pawnbroker."

"Me? Ah, you're——"

"When I poked into your room this afternoon I found a little watch-stem jammed in the sole of one of your brown shoes. I went down to the hockshop and the stem fitted a lady's wristwatch that was being repaired. You picked it up with your shoe when you killed Friedman Tuesday morning. Poore was your cell-mate. He told you about the ninety-thousand dollar hunk of ice. You got to be pals in stir. You went after the ice, and Poore's split was to go toward financing a shyster for a new trial. I saw you talking with Hermie Shantz, the fence, in the *Black and Tan*."

Tubba Klein whirled, rooting himself to the pavement on huge legs. "You're a dirty liar, Donahue! You're a doublecrossin'——!"

"Keep your hands away, you punk, or you'll get a belly-full! I'll give you a break. But I want that ice. I——"

"Ice me eye! I ain't got no ice!"

"I want that ice, brother, or I call on the cops. You're not the kind chucks a gat away after smoking out a guy. You've got the gat on you. Headquarters has the bullet killed Friedman. I get the ice or I call on the cops. You've got just one minute to make up your mind. And when I get the ice, Tubba, I wait three hours before I tip off the cops. If I don't get it, I tip them off now."

Tubba Klem's great chest heaved. His jaw worked, and little sounds strangled in his throat. His huge hands opened and closed.

"It's murder, Tubba, and you'll burn. If I get the ice you get three hours to jump any train you want to. Minute's almost up. There's a drugstore——and a telephone——around the corner."

"Jeeze, I hate your guts!"

"I think they're okey. Minute's up."

Tubba Klem's breath exploded. "You dirty ——"

"Come across——or start walking!"

Tubba Klem coughed. His big hands shook. One hand stopped against his pants belt. Two fingers slipped into the small watch-pocket, came out shaking. The hand clenched. "I'll get you for this, Donahue! If it's the last thing I do I'll get you. I'm gonna get you! Blow your lousy heart out!"

Donahue held out his left hand. Tubba Klem smacked a ball of cloth into it. Donahue fingered the cloth open and felt a small, hard object. He flashed a quick glance at it.

"Now walk, Tubba. Walk to the next block and turn. I'll be standing right here. And if you don't want to conk out before the cops get you . . . then look for me, sweetheart—— look for me. Get."

Tubba Klem turned and lunged off, his huge trunk swinging on his short thick legs. Donahue stood in the

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middle of the sidewalk, his gun in a line with Tubba Klem's back.

A man stepped from the shadows on the opposite side of the street and started across to head off Tubba Klem, Tubba Klem stopped and for a split–instant froze.

“Put 'em up, you!” barked the man.

Donahue tensed. Roper! Roper had been tailing him!

Tubba Klem let out a roar and pitched against a house wall. Both guns leaped out of his pockets. Roper raised his gun and the muzzle blast blazed in the gloom. Tubba Klem screamed, but his guns belched. Roper turned half around in the middle of the street and started falling.

Tubba Klem roared, “Now you, Donahue!” And his guns blazed again.

*Zing!* That was the sound of a high–speed bullet passing over Donahue's head.

Donahue jumped sidewise, danced from foot to foot. Bang. *Bang.* One of Tubba Klem's bullets chipped pavement alongside Donahue's foot. Tubba Klem was not aiming. Like most gunmen he was trying to dynamite his man down.

Donahue had his gun raised, his right arm out straight, right side in a line with Tubba Klem. He pulled the trigger. The report sounded like a small firecracker. He saw Tubba Klem sit down on the pavement, and heard his guns clatter down. He ran forward and found Tubba Klem sticking his tongue out, his eyes bulging.

A police whistle shrilled, and a cop came tearing around the corner.

Tubba Klem was like a man paralyzed, He could see. He could hear. But he couldn't move a muscle. This is what a small calibre bullet does when it strikes a man's solar plexus.

The cop came pounding up with a drawn gun.

“What the hell's the matter?”

Donahue stood up. “This gun and Detective Roper had it out. I had to shoot this guy. He's Tubba Klem.”

“Who are you?”

“Donahue. Interstate Agency. Take this guy's guns. He's not hurt bad. Only his wind's knocked out.”

Donahue rose and ran out—into the street. He dropped down beside Roper. The dick was dead. His throat was torn out and there was blood on his stomach.

“How's Roper?” the cop yelled.

Donahue stood up and went towards the cop, saying, “He's dead.”

There was another cop coming down the street.

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### VI

THE PRECINCT CAPTAIN was a tough nut with a reputation and a clean record. He sat on his desk with arms folded and one foot planted on the seat of the swivel-chair. Roper had gone to the morgue. Tubba Klem had been taken to the hospital.

“Roper,” said the precinct skipper, “dropped in here just this afternoon. He was lookin’ for Tubba Klem.”

“He must have figured the same way I did.”

“I don’t know you, Donahue. Roper knew you well. He said you were the world’s worst pest. A guy that hated city cops——”

“Ah, bologney!” Donahue laughed. “That was Roper’s version of it. Listen, skipper——ask some other guys: Billy Ames, down at Times Square; Captain Hafferkamp at Old Slip; Inspector Kaltenheimer.”

“Anyhow,” the captain said, “I’ll have to take that hunk of ice you took from Tubba Klem.”

Anger leaped into Donahue’s round brown eyes. “After I got it!” He stood up and glared at the captain. “Not on your natural, skipper. This diamond goes in the Agency’s safe. We return it to the European Indemnity company that hired us to get it.” He chuckled brittlely. “You must take me for a two-year-old!”

The captain thinned his gray eyes. “You heard me, Donahue. Stolen property when regained goes into the hands of the police for safe keeping.”

“Now don’t read me the law. I know the law. There are exceptions to every law, and this is one. The Agency has a rock-bound reputation, and you just don’t get the ice.”

“Donahue,” said the captain grimly, “I want that diamond. Hand it over.”

Donahue said, “Mind if I use the phone?” He picked up the instrument and called Headquarters. He got Inspector Kaltenheimer on the wire, then handed the phone to the captain.

The skipper tightened his lips, spoke into the mouthpiece. A minute later he hung up, twisted his lips and put down the phone.

“Okey, Donahue. Thanks for going over my head.” He got off the desk, turned his back on Donahue and walked to a window, staring bitterly out into the street.

“The trouble with a lot of you guys,” said Donahue, “is that you’re not grateful. I give your precinct Tubba Klem, and still you yap.”

The skipper said nothing. Donahue put on his hat, started a cigarette, and went out.

At a corner drugstore he made a telephone call.

“Billy Ames? . . . Hello, Billy. Donahue. Listen, I got Tubba Klem. . . . I’m sorry, kid, but a couple of bulls took him over, up here in Harlem. . . . Yeah, I’m up here now. I thought I might be able to give you the pinch, but there was no go. But listen, Billy. I’ll do right by you. . . . Well, it’s this way. Some jane was after the ice, too. She’s got a boy friend. The jane handed me a tough line in Julie’s tonight and said I was on the spot. Now you can take this tip or leave it. . . . Yeah, it sounds good to me. She and the guy are living at number —— Waverly Place. Third floor, front, left——as I saw it from the street. I’d go heeled, Billy——and maybe I’d take some boys along. . . . Roper? Oh, Roper got his throat shot out by Tubba ‘Klem. . . . Yeah. I’ll tell you about it when I see you. . . . Sure. Good-bye, Billy.”

He hung up, went out and entered a downtown subway kiosk.

It was eleven o’clock when he entered the lobby of his hotel. He went to a writing desk, sat down and drew out the diamond. Gold fire in the palm of his hand! He took a half a dozen sheets of note paper, folded one four times around the stone, then doubled the other five around that. He slipped the lot into an envelope and sealed it. He went over to the desk and said:

“Hello, John. Put this in the safe till morning, will you?”

“Will you write your name on it, Mr. Donahue?”

“I forgot.” He picked up a pen and dashed off his name.

John took a key and a letter from one of the cubbyholes behind. He said, “A lady left this note for you, Mr. Donahue.”

“Thanks.” Donahue tore it open while John went to the safe and put away the letter Donahue had given him.

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Donahue read:

*Dear Donahue,*

*Forget about that row tonight, will you? I was off my head. I came around to apologize but you weren't in. If you will meet me at that place in Tenth Street tomorrow night, I'll explain.*

No signature. Donahue crammed the letter in his pocket and went to a telephone booth. He called a number and when the connection was made, he said:

"Billy Ames there? . . . When did he leave? . . . I see. . . . No; no message."

He slammed the receiver into the hook and rolled out of the booth scowling. Ames had left the precinct half an hour ago. That meant he was already at the address in Waverly Place.

Donahue sighed, got in the elevator and was whisked upward. He stepped out into a quiet corridor, walked on thick green carpet. He took out his keys inserted one in the lock of his door. He entered and pressed the light switch just inside the door. "Put 'em up, brother." Donahue froze.

A man was standing in the center of the room holding a big automatic pistol. The woman was sitting on the divan, smiling.

"Why, you dirty——"

"Cut it!" bit off the man. "Close that door! Lock it!"

Donahue kicked the door shut but did not lock it. He turned and looked at the man.

"Lock it, I said!"

"Lock it yourself."

The man jerked his head. "Lock it, Clio."

The woman got up, sauntered across the room and turned the key. Donahue eyed her narrowly.

He said, "How the hell did you punks get up here?"

"Simple," she said. "I went back to the speak after you left and got talking with that drunken reporter. He told me where you lived. I came over and asked for you. You weren't in. I wrote the note and watched where the clerk put it. I could see the room number on the cubbyhole. Then I got"——she nodded to the man——"my husband, and we sprung the lock. My husband——"

"Without benefit of clergy," sneered Donahue.

"That's enough juice outta you!" barked the man. "Take his gun, Clio."

She tapped Donahue's hip pockets, then his coat pockets. She wore a puzzled look.

"Look under his arm," coached the man, and moved around to Donahue's left side.

She got the gun and stepped away.

The man with the gun came closer, "Now that ice, brother."

Donahue bit him with a contemptuous eye. "Ah, lay off that. I haven't got any ice."

"Frisk him, Clio."

The man moved around behind Donahue, pressed the muzzle of his gun against Donahue's back. The woman went through Donahue's vest pockets. She went through his coat pockets. She went through his pants pockets. Then she emptied his wallet on the table.

"Nothing, Jess," she said.

The man came around to face Donahue. He was a big-shouldered man, the same one Donahue had seen yawning in the room in Waverly Place. His eyes were glacier blue, his nose battered, his lips wide and thick. He bared a row of teeth, two of which were gold.

"I want that ice, Donahue. You got it. You switched it when you got it from Bonalino, when that Poore rat was sent up. I know you private dicks. You're a lot of crooks, and a hunk of ice like that was worth more to you than any job could pay you for a lifetime. I tell you, I want it!"

"Well, if I had it, guy, I'd give it to you. But I haven't got it. That's on the up and up."

"You know where it is, then! Where is it?"

Donahue grinned. "Sure I know where it is."

"Then where is it?"

"At a precinct in Harlem."

The man's eyes narrowed. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. You sap, you've been on a blind trail. I had the ice. I had it tonight. I took it from Tubba Klem. He was

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Poore's cell-mate in the Big House. He got it from Friedman, the pawnbroker. I put a bullet in Tubba's guts, and I had to leave the ice with the precinct captain. Tubba smoked out Roper, a precinct dick, before I got him. You'll see it in the first editions."

"That's just a line, Jess," the woman said. "He's stalling for time. Don't swallow that."

Jess jabbed the gun hard against Donahue's stomach. "Listen, baby. You're in a hell of a tough spot——"

"I know I am, Jess. And I'm trying to get out of— it. So help me God, I'm telling the truth."

The woman laid Donahue's gun on the divan and said, "Jess, if you swallow that you're a jackass. This guy is as two-faced as they come. Let's take him for a ride."

Jess said, "How would you like to go for a ride, Donahue?"

"Come on, be your age," Donahue said. "Don't you suppose I'd cough up if I had the ice? I told you where it is. Call the hospital and see if Tubba Klem isn't there. There's the phone."

"What hospital?"

"The Harlem Hospital on Lenox Avenue."

"Look up the number, Clio."

The woman found a telephone book, flipped the pages, found the number. "Call it," said Jess.

"What, I should call from this room? Don't be that way. Make this bright boy do it."

"Go ahead, Donahue."

Donahue put the call through, and while he was waiting for the connection Jess told Clio to take it over. Donahue handed her the phone.

In a few seconds she said, "Harlem Hospital? ... I want to know how Mr. Klem is? ... All right. Thanks."

She hung up, scowled. "He's resting."

Donahue smiled. "As I told you."

The woman spun on him, her green eyes murderous. "So you think you're out of it, eh?" Her nostrils quivered, her whole body began to vibrate.

Jess snarled, "Snap out of it, Clio!" but his tone smacked of indecision.

She snapped at Jess, "Are you turning la-de-da?" The man's jaw hardened, but he said nothing. The woman clenched her hands and jerked her green stare back to Donahue. "No, you're not out of it! You're going for a ride, brother! You're going to get your guts blown out!"

Now Donahue was baffled.

Her voice rose, quavering hysterically. "You hear me! You're going for a ride!"

"What the hell good will that do you?"

"Good? A lot of good, you——damn dick! A lot of good! All right . . . the ice is safe in the precinct. But you get yours anyhow. You know what you did to get this ride? Do you?"

"No," dully.

Blue veins stood out on her forehead. "You sent my sister up for ten years."

"You're——"

"My sister! Irene Saffarrans!"

"Good God, Clio!" growled Jess. "Calm yourself!"

Donahue's brown eyes opened wide.

"Shut up, Jess!" she cried. "You've got to go through this with me. You promised. That's what we came here for. If we didn't get the ice, then we were to get this louse. You promised, Jess! You can't let me down!"

"Wait a minute," broke in Donahue. "For God's sake, sister, you're crazy——"

"And you shut up, big boy!" she snarled. "You've said all you're going to say! You hounded her. You sent her up for ten years. Ten years! You're a sneak, a dirty double-crossing yellow dog——"

"And you're a liar!" Donahue broke in hotly. "I sent her up. Yes, I did. But I managed to get her ten years instead of fifteen, which she deserved. She double-crossed every man she ever traveled with. She caused the deaths of Crosby, Babe Delaney, Bruhard, and the little old Adler. And because of her Poore went to the Big House. Don't tell me! That sister of yours was a crook——and a dirty one——from the word go! I know you janes——the whole lot of you! I wouldn't wipe my feet on you! And I know how to treat a lady, sister, when I meet one. But this lousy business I'm in——"

"That's enough," she snapped. "Jess, we'll take this guy. Down the stairs and out the side entrance. We'll walk

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him to the car and ride him up First Avenue and pitch him from the Willis Avenue Bridge,”

Jess's eyes nickered, and muscles bulged alongside his jaw. His voice was muffled when he said, “Okey, Clio. . . Put your hat on, Donahue.” ’

“Listen, Jess——”

“Put it on!” choked Jess.

Donahue picked up his hat. His face turned gray, a humid look came into his brown eyes.

Clio went over and listened at the door. Then she unlocked it. Opened it. Jess jerked his chin, and Donahue walked past him slowly into the corridor, his lips hueless.

Clio whispered, “Past the elevator to the stairway!”

“Go ahead, Donahue,” said Jess.

Donahue had taken two steps when the elevator door opened.

VII

THE THREE STOPPED. Jess slipped his gun into his pocket. The elevator door was open, but no one came out. The girl looked at Jess and Jess looked at the girl. Donahue looked towards the elevator. None of them could see its door, but all knew that it had opened.

Then it closed. It was a silent elevator. You could not hear its movement in the shaft.

Jess drew out his gun. "Mosey along, Donahue."

The girl led the way to the end of the hall, opened a door that led to a cement stairway. Their feet echoed on the way down. It was really a fire exit. Jess walked behind Donahue, his big hand white-knuckled on the gun.

Presently the girl stopped. "The next landing is the last, Jess. Shove the rod in your coat pocket. If he makes a break let him have it."

"Okey, Clio."

They went out into a marble corridor where a few lights burned. They started down an arcade lined by exclusive little shops—all dark at this hour. Glass swing-doors were at the end leading into Ninth Street. Donahue marched between the man and the woman.

Clio moved ahead when they neared the swing-doors. She pushed one open and held it open while Jess prodded Donahue into the street. Then she let the door swing shut on its silent spring, and they started east on Ninth Street towards University Place.

"Hey, you!"

The woman flung a look over her shoulder. Jess hugged his gun tight and twisted.

There was a man standing on the sidewalk in front of the hotel entrance. Even in the gloom Donahue recognized Billy Ames.

Said Billy Ames, "Put 'em up!"

"It's a frame!" the woman muttered. "That guy was waiting for us! Donahue knew it!"—

Her hand jumped from the pocket of her blue coat and a small automatic spat sharply. Ames had jumped sidewise. The woman bared her teeth and sent three shots in rapid succession. One of them got Ames. He flinched, and then the gun in his hand banged.

"Oh-o," the woman grunted. One of her legs buckled, and she slumped to the sidewalk.

Jess roared and blazed away, and Ames staggered backwards, as his own gun thundered. Donahue fell on the gun in the woman's hand, tore it from her feeble grasp. He whirled on Jess, charged him and jammed the muzzle against his side, press the trigger. The explosion was muffled by Jess's clothes.

Jess heaved away, groaning. He started running. Donahue streaked after him. Swinging into University Place, Jess twisted and sent two shots at Donahue. One nailed Donahue in the left leg, and he skidded against the building. He clawed his way to the corner and saw Jess running north on University Place. He toiled after him, hopping on one foot, dragging the other. If only he had the long-barreled twenty-two!

Crossing the street, Jess turned for another shot. Donahue heard the bullet *snick* past his ear, heard it crash the plate glass window of a shop. Donahue fell down, lay panting at the curb. Jess ran on towards a parked car.

Donahue got up and tried to run on both legs. The experiment drew a rasp of pain from his throat that was clipped short by tightened lips. He hopped across the street, his breath clotting in his throat. He heard the cough of a starting motor, saw smoke belch from the parked car's exhaust. He clamped his teeth and tried to run again on both legs. The pain seemed to stab to his brain. It made him dizzy. But he stuck it out. Stuck it out till he reached the back of the car. But the car was starting.

Donahue grabbed the spare tire, got his arms around it. He was dragged a matter of ten yards before he got his foot clamped in the inside of the rim. He hung on grimly as the car wheeled around a corner. It was a big sedan.

East on Sixteenth Street, past Stuyvesant Square, and then north on First Avenue with the throttle wide open. Donahue hung on, his wounded left leg lying across the tail light, shooting pain through his body with each bump. After a while the car slowed down to a normal rate of speed. It made a left turn into Thirty-seventh Street and rolled past garages and dark-faced houses. Halfway up the block it swung in to the curb and came to a stop.

Donahue was already off the tire. He staggered up the side of the car as Jess pushed the door, open and shoved



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a foot out.

“Come right on out,” said Donahue, “but watch your step.”

“Why, damn my soul——”

“Out Jess, or I'll finish you right here.”

Jess stumbled out, one hand pressed to his side, pain on his face.

“I gotta get a doc, Donahue.”

“So have I, you big bum.”

Jess was breathing hoarsely, doubling up.

“But you walk now,” Donahue said. He reached out with his left hand and tore the gun from Jess's hand.

“Walk to Lexington Avenue. There's a hotel up there where I can telephone.”

“I can't! So help me, I can't go another step!”

Donahue leaned against the car, his face drawn. He hefted the two guns. “Get, Jess——or I'll empty both these rods in your belly!”

Jess staggered away from the car. Donahue toiled after him, dragging his left leg, hopping on the right. Jess dragged his heels, bent far forward, both hands held to his side. They crossed Second Avenue, crossed Third and started up the hill towards Lexington. Half way up Jess fell to the pavement, groaning.

“Get up, Jess!”

“I can't. Honest to God, I can't! Oh—o . . . God. . . . God!”

Donahue started towards where Jess lay, but he never made it. He dropped three feet short, and lay braced on one elbow. Jess was sitting facing him, hands gripping his side, torso rocking from side to side. The street was dark, deserted; not even a house light shone. At the next corner was the hotel.

For fully two minutes they said nothing. They could hear each other's labored breathing, see each other's sweat-smearing and pain-twisted face. Then Jess fell quietly side-wise.

Donahue looked at him through glassy eyes. The street began to fade. Jess became a dark blur lying on the sidewalk. Donahue's braced arm collapsed, and his head struck the sidewalk. He could not move it. Blackness was sweeping down on him.

His hand tightened on the gun he had taken from Jess. He pulled the trigger, kept pulling it until the hammer clicked. The echoes of the shots hammered violently in the narrow street.

“This last play was a bad one. We've got it straight now that Poore sent Tubba Klem after the ice. Poore figured that Friedman had switched it. And we've got it straight that Irene Saffarrans had a long talk with her sister and Irene figured that you'd switched the ice.”

Donahue sighed. “Okey, boss . . . okey. Get the ice and get rid of it. It's the unluckiest hunk of ice I ever tailed. I'm on my back for a month, and I don't want to hear about it, don't want to talk about it. I'm sick of guns and gun-toting frails. When I can walk I'm going to go to the country. I know a guy up in the mountains. He's got a cabin there. And it's quiet as hell. God, Asa, it'll be good to smell the woods and forget all about business!”

Asa sat back with a reflective smile. “You know, Donny, I'd like to go with you.”

Donahue glared. “Nix. You couldn't get enough newspapers, and you couldn't go an hour without talking about your life's work. Nix, boss. Just nix.”

Hinkle chuckled. “I guess you're right, son.”

## Spare The Rod

WHEN DONAHUE came into the office Asa Hinkle, the pontifical-looking head of the Interstate Agency, looked up from the stock quotations he was frowning over.

"I thought you'd be at Tony's," he said.

"I was learning some card tricks."

"Well, I don't suppose that could be any worse than playing the market."

"I told the boys I'd be right back."

Asa Hinkle sat back and pulled a memorandum from the drawer. "You have a reservation," he said, "on the Pennsy tonight—for St. Louis. You'd better take plenty of clean shirts."

Donahue stopped a lighted match half-way to the cigarette that hung from his lips. Then he grunted, put flame to tobacco, and snapped the match into a cuspidor.

"Who the hell wants to go to St. Louis?" he said.

"Boy, the way my finances stand now, St. Louis is as good as any place. You'd better take along some Scotch, too. I hear they're having a cold snap out there and you can only buy gin and thrice-cut Bourbon."

"Listen, Asa, the last time P went to that burg I almost got fogged out. Not only that, but there was a shyster there named Stein who double-crossed us."—, I

"This is simple," said Hinkle. "It looks to me like nothing more serious than being a bodyguard. The client's name is William Herron. He's at the Apollo Hotel, in Locust Street—room 804. I think your train gets in at five tomorrow evening."

"What's the matter; haven't they got any private dicks in St. Louis?"

"That is neither here nor there. Herron called us on long distance just before noon today. I told him that it seemed a little irregular and that I didn't think we could send a man out there unless we had a retainer. He said that would be given as soon as you arrived. I said that it was possible to send money over the Western Union. Half an hour ago I collected three hundred dollars that he sent by telegraph. I just wired him that Mr. Donahue would arrive about five tomorrow evening."

Donahue tipped back his Homburg. "Providing you supply the Scotch."

"I have two bottles here in the desk."

"Suppose I get in Dutch out there?"

"Go to Moss Garrity, in Olive Street. And remember, tip no more than ten per cent. And don't include any money lost in those East St. Louis gambling joints."

"I'll be good."

"I seem to have heard that before. But anyhow, start packing."

The sound of wheels rattling over switches, the slow lurching of the Pullman, the muted jangling of bells, woke Donahue up. He looked out of the window and saw railroad yards: red lights, green lights, many steel rails shining in the gloom.

He picked up a book that had fallen to the floor, stowed it in the Gladstone, took a flat black automatic from beneath a suit of pajamas and shoved it into his pocket.

The train crawled into the shed. Donahue put on raglan and Homburg, submitted to the porter's ministrations, tipped him, grabbed up the Gladstone and got off. He defied porters on the way up the platform, went through the barn-like station and came out in Market Street. He took a taxi and it rushed him to Twelfth,—north on Twelfth, east on Locust. He got off at the Apollo Hotel.

He had wired ahead for a room on the eighth floor. They gave him number 812, and a black boy took the key and the bag and piloted Donahue aloft; opened a window in the room, opened the closet door, grinned with white horse teeth in a sooty black face.

"Anything else, suh?"

"I brought my own."

"Thank you, suh."

The boy left and Donahue stood for a moment staring down into Locust street, where a pall of smoke and fog

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dimmed the lights. Then he took off hat and topcoat and sat down at the small metal desk. He took up the telephone receiver. “

“Give me room 804,” he said. Presently he heard a man's voice, and said: “Mr. Herron? . . . This is Donahue, the Interstate man from New York. Should I come right over? . . . I'm down the hall from you in 812. . . . All right, I'll be right over.”

He hung up and sat staring blankly at the instrument for a full minute. Then he rose, wagged his head dubiously, frowned with his lean-cheeked brown face. He looked like a man reacting visibly to a vague inner instinct; to an intangible warning against which his better judgment was as nothing compared with the force of circumstance. With a hoarse sigh, begrudgingly philosophical, he went to the door, opened it and locked it from the outside; went down the corridor with a shadowy forehead and slow deliberate footsteps.

Herron let him in after a moment's scrutiny through big horn-rimmed glasses.

“Well—well, so you got here; so you did get here!”

There was no handshaking. Donahue, hands thrust into jacket pockets, strolled in as though the room and Herron were a familiar ensemble. Herron locked the door behind him, quickly. Donahue walked the length of the room and turned finally when he reached the windows. The shades were drawn. The room, larger and more pretentious than Donahue's, was close, stuffy, as though no air had permeated it in a long while.

Herron, beaming with a fat florid face, chafed fat white hands and stood watching Donahue with eyes that laughed without losing their scrutiny. Donahue returned the look with candid brown eyes and immobile brown features.

“Well—well, now that you are, Mr. Donahue—now that you are here—well, sit down. Of course, sit down—anywhere.”

“I've been sitting all the way from New York.”

Donahue continued to stand, feet a little apart, broad shoulders slouching, hands in pockets. Herron lumbered across the room and turned on another light. He was well-dressed, a vigorous fat man whose fat was not particularly doughy. Solid white fat. Crinkly gray hair. Big eyes with a bright blue baffling look. His age might have been forty or fifty. He sat down in a mohair armchair, lit a dark cigar, began to smile reflectively.

“I suppose you think it odd, don't you?”

Donahue shrugged. “I haven't got the details yet.”

“Oh, I mean—I mean my sending “to New York for a private detective. Eh? Don't you?”

“I'm never surprised, Mr. Herron.”

“Well, I am glad to hear that, Mr. Donahue. I am certainly glad to hear that. Yes, sir—indeed. I think you will find that it was worth your while to leave New York and come here. I have to have a man I can depend on implicitly. Eh? Implicitly! You understand that, of course.”

“Yes.”

“Splendid! And I am a man you can depend on too, Mr. Donahue. Depend on me to compensate your Agency for anything you do. And I might add—I will add, in fact, that a little premium for yourself will not be entirely out of order. Eh?”

“Go on, Mr. Herron.”

“Of course, to be sure. These little preliminaries I think are necessary. I am a man who believes in certain preliminaries, Mr. Donahue; one might even call them courtesies, or delicacies. You appear to me to be a man of intelligence and tact and also a man of courage and tenacity. Said as much to myself the moment I laid eyes on you. And I believe in giving credit where credit is due.

“Now, Mr. Donahue—now.” Herron took three quick puffs on his cigar. “My real name is not Herron. You may as well know that now, though I implore you to keep it a secret. You must at all times call me Herron. My real name is Stanley Edgecomb. As Stanley Edgecomb I was supposed to have left for Hot Springs three days ago. I didn't. I am here, in this hotel, incognito. I have not been out of this room since the night I walked in as William Herron. I want to be frank with you, Mr. Donahue.”

For the first time since he had entered the room a glimmer of interest appeared in Donahue's eyes.

“Surprised—eh?”

“No,” said Donahue.

“By Godfrey, you are an uncommon fellow! A man of parts you are, Mr. Donahue! Ton my word!” He swayed

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in the chair in what seemed like a paroxysm of sheer delight.

Donahue began to speak frankly, bluntly— “Mr. Herron, suppose we get down to cases. It's kind of you to spread a lot of bouquets around, to tell me I'm pretty damn' good. I know I'm pretty good, Mr. Herron. What are you driving at? In short, what is your particular kind of racket?”

“Racket, Mr. Donahue, is an ugly word. I wish you would not use it again. Stanley Edgecomb is well known in this city. He is a lawyer. I, Stanley Edgecomb, am a lawyer. A price is on my head, that price set by the head of a notorious gang. I was warned to leave this city within twenty-four hours. To all appearances, I left, deciding that discretion was the better part of valor—outwardly, at least.

“Understand, I dare not show my face on the streets. Not even my friends know that I am here. My house is closed, but I believe it is being watched. And this is where you come in. In my haste to get away from the house, I left behind some valuable papers, in my safe. I want you to get those papers.”

“Anybody in the house?”

“One servant, old Jansen, who sleeps on the top floor. But you will not disturb Jansen. I will give you my keys and the combination to my safe. In the safe is a black metal box. In that box are these papers. You will bring me the box. Eh?”

Donahue frowned. “How long do you expect to stay here in hiding?”

“Until the police have rounded up the gang. It was on the advice of a policeman that I left town. He doesn't know I did not leave. He thought I would be safer while the process of rounding up was going on. I have been worried, thinking that someone might break into my house and get these papers. I think they would be safer with me. Now— here are my keys. This one opens the rear door. I will give you this one. And here is a diagram of the interior of the house, showing the room where the safe is located. Midnight or after would be the best time.”

“And you got me all the way from New York—for this?”

“Of course, Mr. Donahue. The papers are valuable to me. They contain much evidence against the gang I started out to crush.”

“Why didn't you hire a private cop right in town?”

“Because I am too well known here. Come, come, Mr. Donahue. If you are incredulous, inquire anywhere as to the reputation of mine. Ask anyone who Stanley Edgecomb is.”

Donahue shrugged. “Well, I take the key. And let us go over the plans.”

“To be sure, Mr. Donahue!”

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### II

AT ELEVEN-THIRTY that night Donahue walked out of the Apollo Hotel and climbed into a taxi. He gave an address and the taxi turned left into Seventh Street, west on Olive. It was cold, and Donahue slouched in one corner of the tonneau, his collar up around his ears, his hat yanked down over his eyes.

Fifteen minutes later the taxi drew up at the corner of Lindell Boulevard and Kings Highway. Donahue got out, paid up, took a look at the Hotel Chase and then dodged traffic on the way across the monumental plaza. He walked west on Lindell, with pretentious homes on his right, Forest Park on his left, a cold wind at his back. His well-shod feet smacked the pavement with dogged deliberation, his dark eyes, hawkish beneath his hat brim, cruised the street and kept watching the houses. Finally his eyes settled on an imposing rough-stone house with a tower on its left. Broad lawns lay before it. The windows were darkened.

But Donahue walked past, his eyes keening, jabbing the shadows on all sides. The street seemed deserted of people, though cars hummed past occasionally. The wind rattled in the leafless trees and the Park was black and silent beyond. After a while Donahue about-faced and retraced his steps. He did not slow down. He turned abruptly into the cement walk leading to the towered house and quite as abruptly went around to the rear.

Basement windows were almost flush with the cement. The door was down at the end of three steps. It was a heavy wooden door, and Donahue inserted the key, turned it quietly, opened the door and entered. He did not lock it.

He drew out a small flashlight, the size of a large fountain pen, and played its beam on the cement floor. He went past coal bins and a warm furnace and found a stairway which he followed upward to a door that opened at his touch. He entered a large pantry, went from it into a large kitchen and then into a small serving pantry.

Next was a swing-door—and he found himself in a dining-room. He moved quickly, surely, because he had memorized the plan of the house by heart. Next a drawing-room, large and sumptuous. To the left a foyer—and across the foyer a library. He closed the French doors of the library behind him, turned out the flash, drew down four shades, and then turned the flash on again.

He crossed the room to a row of bookcases, counted off, then swung out one of the compartments. The face of a circular wall-safe glinted in the flash's beam. He took out a slip of paper and went to work. In a short moment he had the safe open. He removed a black metal box, closed the safe, swung the book-section back into place. He turned out the flashlight, raised the four shades and returned to the French doors.

In a minute he was outside, locking the basement door. He was starting around the side of the house when he saw a man leaning against a tree on the Boulevard. The man moved slightly, but remained against the tree.

Donahue pressed against the wall of the house and retreated. He held the box tightly under his left arm. His right hand tightened on the flat black automatic in his pocket. He stood for a moment in perplexed indecision. Then he peered cautiously around the corner of the house.

The man was still standing by the tree. Another man walked past slowly, and the two seemed to look at each other. There was no purpose in the walking man's footsteps; he seemed to be strolling idly.

Donahue retreated again, went farther back in the yard. He came to an arbor connecting two octagon shaped summer-houses. Beyond was a high stone wall. He would make considerable noise getting over that, would make of himself a handy target for any wayward gun. Had those men tailed him from downtown? If they had, they would know what he looked like.

Snap-judgment decided his next move. He hid the black box behind a row of shrubbery that grew close to the stone wall. Then he stood up and followed the wall. It was easy work scaling the hedge that separated the grounds of the towered house from the grounds of the next. He went back of three houses, then turned and walked boldly to the street.

Reaching the sidewalk, he looked negligently down the Boulevard and saw the man still leaning against the tree; saw the other walking idly. Donahue set out briskly away from them. Presently he heard footsteps walking rapidly behind him. Two pairs of footsteps. "He did not look around. The automobiles went humming by. The men were walking faster.

Then suddenly a car drew into the curb, passed Donahue and stopped a dozen yards ahead in front of an

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imposing red-brick house. A tall man got out and headed for the approach leading to the house. But he stopped short and turned towards Donahue. A gun appeared in his hand.

Donahue, thinking only of the two behind, was taken by surprise.

The tall man said: "Get in that car."

"Listen——"

"Get in!"

The two men came up and crowded Donahue with drawn guns, and the tall man helped them rush Donahue into the big sedan. He landed in the seat and the tall man slid down beside him, pressing his gun against Donahue's ribs. One of the others climbed in front beside the chauffeur, and the last to come in took one of the folding seats facing Donahue and the tall man.

"All right, Charlie," the tall man said.

The chauffeur shifted into gear and the big sedan started off.

Donahue chuckled. "That was sweet work, boys."

"Put your hands up," said the tall man. He took away Donahue's gun and then said: "Where is it?"

"Where is what?"

"The stuff you came after."

Donahue shook his head. "You've got me wrong."

"Cut that!" The gun jabbed Donahue's ribs viciously.

"Honest," Donahue said. "I haven't got a thing."

"Frisk him, Pete," the tall man said.

Pete leaned forward and ransacked Donahue's pockets.

After a minute he played a small pocket flash on the spoils, said: "Well, here's his wallet and a key ring and here's a loose key and here's a hunk of paper was in his overcoat pocket, and an Apollo key."

The tall man examined the articles with exasperated scrutiny. "Private Shamus, eh?" he snarled. "This is certainly a new one on me! . . . What's these numbers mean on here?"

"Probably telephone numbers."

"My eye!"

Pete suggested, "Maybe a combination——"

"That's it!" the tall man rasped. "And this is the key."

"Hey," called Charlie from behind the wheel, "should I head out towards the river?"

"Just keep moving," the tall man said.

"I was thinkin'," Charlie said, "about them woods this side o' the bridge, just in case you want to——"

"Shut up and keep moving," the tall man growled. Donahue said: "I hope you guys aren't fools enough to try taking me for a ride."

The tall man jabbed him again. "Listen, Shamus! You were in that house! You got something——"

"Yeah, he was in that house all right," Pete said.——,

"Of course I was in that house," Donahue said.

"Well!" the tall man rasped.

"Well," Donahue said, "what the hell of it? Have I got anything? Pipe this, you wiseacres. I saw the guys hanging around outside. I knew it was a plant. And when I see you birds, d' you think I'd be jackass enough to walk out waving the bacon? Not in these old trousers, you dumb hoods."

"Ah, sock 'at loud-mouthed punk," Charlie flung over his shoulder.

"This key," the tall man said to Donahue. "You used it to get in, didn't you?"

"Maybe I did."

"And these numbers on this hunk of paper——"

"I can't imagine how they got in my pocket," Donahue said.

Pete said, jabbing his finger at the paper: "That's it, I'll bet. I'll bet that's it. And that there's the key. It's a big key, see. It ain't a hotel key. And his other keys are on a ring. That's the key, I'll bet. I'll bet it is."

"I think you're right, Pete," the tall man said. "Turn off that flashlight."

Pete sat back and the flash's beam swept upward before it vanished. Donahue caught a fleeting glimpse of the tall man's face. A long, narrow face, white and bony, with blue hollows on the cheeks, hueless lips, a thin nose,

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intense black eyes, small, feverish.

The car hummed on in silence.

Finally the tall man said: "Charlie, drive home." He leaned back, raised his gun and struck Donahue on the head. Donahue pitched to the floor of the car and lay motionless.

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### III

DONAHUE CAME TO in a large bare room. He lay on a cot, a slim dirty mattress the only thing between him and the spring. A single globe burned in the center of the room. Two green shades were drawn. He got up painfully and slouched to one of the windows, pulled up the shade. It was dark out, windy. He could see gaunt limbs of trees moving, and rolling open land beyond. The window was protected on the outside by three vertical bars. He pulled down the shade again and turned.

“That’s it: keep that shade down,” a man said from the doorway.

“Now look here,” Donahue began, “what the hell’s the use of keeping me cooped here?”

The man was small, chunky, blond. He held a revolver in his hand and his pale blue eyes were glacial.

“I said, keep that shade down.”

“The hell with the shade. What I want to know——”

“What you want to know, buddy, don’t mean a thing to me.”

The man’s voice, like his eyes, was frigid. He backed out and closed the door.

Donahue shrugged and dropped back to the cot. He fished a crumpled cigarette from his pocket, lit up and reclined on one elbow. His brown eyes thinned down speculatively.—He held inhalations of smoke long in his lungs, then let the smoke dribble out slowly through his nostrils. He looked at his strap-watch. It was half-past one in the morning.

At two he heard the sound of an automobile engine. He rose and cat-footed to one of the windows, drew the shade aside just far enough to peer out. He saw two big headlights among the trees, several shadows of men moving; heard low voices, a door open.

He went back and sat down on the cot. Two minutes later the door swung in and the tall man stood there in a baggy ulster belted tightly at the middle and a derby tilted on his head. Back of him were some more men: Pete and Charlie and the blond and the other man who had ridden in the car.

The tall man was drawing off his gloves. The cold had put spots on his thin white face. His small black eyes glittered.

“Shamus,” he said in a thin brittle voice, “you’ve just got to come clean.”

Donahue stretched and yawned. “About what?”

“Jeeze, I’m gettin’ to hate ‘at guy!” snarled Charlie.

Pete said: “Keep your mouth shut, Charlie.”

The tall man swaggered into the room, his face sinister in a quiet unostentatious manner, his black eyes almost luminous with a suppressed ferocity.

He said: “It was the key. It was the combination. “But”—— he showed thin small teeth gradually——“the stuff was gone!”

“No!”

“Just——yes.”

Back of the tall thin man the others waited, rooted to the floor like images, like Robots that would move at the magic touch of a single word.

Donahue stood up slowly. He swallowed once. He looked from one to another of the men slowly, dispassionately, with a strange brown-eyed candor. Then he spread his hands palmwise.

“What am I supposed to say?”

“You,” came the thin brittle voice of the tall man, “know what to say.”

“So help me, brother, I don’t.”

The tall man took a long springy step and caught Donahue by the collar in a long-fingered strong hand. His black eyes stared fiercely, his thin nostrils twitched.

“You’ll tell me,” he droned somberly. “By ——, you’re not as fancy as you think you are! You hear me!”

The brown-eyed candor of Donahue’s eyes seemed to enrage the tall man. His taut arm throbbed. He cursed and flung Donahue sprawling to the cot. Charlie whipped out an automatic and started dancing up and down like a boxer, a mirthless grin spreading his lips.



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The tall man looked at Charlie and said: "Calm down, you." Then he looked at Donahue. "We've been watching that house for days. Nobody could have taken it out. Nobody left or went in the house but you. What I want to know is, how do you figure in this spread? Where do you come in? Who sent you?"

"The man who owns the house sent me. Where the hell do you think I got the key——made it?"

The tall man stepped back, bending his brows. "Stanley Edgecomb sent——"

"I guess he had a right to, since he owns the house and the property I went after."

"Where is he now?"

"Hell knows. I picked up the job in——well——Kansas City. He was on his way West——South. I was to take the stuff and put it in a safe deposit vault, send him the key and receipt. I was paid three hundred bucks in advance——"

"Ah, he's lyin'; that guy's lyin'," Charlie snarled.

"Shut up," the tall man said.

"That wiper of yours sure has a nasty disposition." Donahue said, with a nod towards Charlie.

The tall man said: "Never mind him. Why the hell did Edgecomb send you into his own house? Couldn't you've gone to his caretaker?"

"He didn't even want the caretaker to know. Listen. I'm a private cop and when I pick up a three-hundred-dollar job as easy as this looked, cripes, I don't ask too many questions. He said the house might be watched. He warned me. Now what a swell spot I'm in when I report that the stuff wasn't there. You guys have got me all wrong. I've got no grudge against you——none of you, except maybe Charlie, and he smells, or maybe he's just kind of meshuga——"

"Ixnay on them wisecracks," Charlie snarled, massaging his gun.

The tall man had calmed down considerably. He plucked thoughtfully at his lip, looking around at his men.

Pete said: "It's somethin' phony somewhere, I'll bet. I'll bet my shirt there's somethin' phony. I'll bet you anything there is."

Donahue chimed in: "You said it, Pete. There certainly is. When Edgecomb sends me to his own house to get something, and it isn't there——" He threw up his hands. "Well, every little thing isn't strictly on the up and up. Look at the hole I'm in. Listen, if I thought"——he jabbed a forefinger rigidly into space——"if I thought I was going to get mixed up in a scatter like this I'd never have taken the job. Not me." He waved his hands alongside his ears. "No, sir——not this baby!"

Charlie snarled: "Ah, this guy's just tryin' to talk himself out o' the hot grease! Let me take him for a walk in the woods."

"You," Donahue said sagely, "had better spare the rod."

"And spoil the kid, eh?"

"No. And save yourself from the hot seat, torpedo."

"Sh!" the tall man said.

There were running footsteps racing down a stairway. A man burst into the room.——

"Jeeze, there's a car parked down the street——just parked. It looks like cops——"

"All the shades down?" cut in the tall man.

"Sure."

Charlie growled: "I'll get the Tommy guns——"

"You wait a minute!" snapped the tall man. "Those plates were changed, weren't they?"

"Sure," Pete said quickly. "Changed them as soon as we got back."

"What d' you do with the others?"

"Chucked them down the well."

"Okey." The tall man listened intently for a split-moment. "Now get this. No shooting. If it's the cops, let 'em in. Spread some cards on the table, and a bottle. Look contented, everybody."

He spun on Donahue. "You——you'll sit at the table with the boys. Take your overcoat off. And hold your tongue."

"Now you wait a minute," Donahue clipped crisply.

"None of that stuff. You're in a tough spot. So am I. I'll play my part providing I walk out with the cops when they leave. I'll walk to their car, wait till they go, and then go with them."

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“Nix on that!” Charlie barked. “This guy——”

“I’m not talking to you, you heel. I’m talking to your boss.”

“You’ll wait till they’re gone,” the tall man said.

“Nothing doing,” Donahue flung back hotly. “You can’t shoot me now. You can’t start a fight. They’d hear it. I walk out with the cops. I tell them nothing. Take that——or leave it.”

“My ——!” groaned Charlie.

The tall man muttered: “Okey.”

“Jeeze, you gonna let this guy——”

“Shut up, Charlie! It’s the only out.”

Pete said: “Somebody knocking.”

“Answer it,” the tall man said. “You other guys——inside. Quick! I’ll do the talking.” His black feverish eyes glittered on Donahue. Donahue smiled. “

“Two-time,” the tall man muttered, “and I’ll fog your guts.”

“How about a little stud,” Donahue recommended.

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### IV

THEY SAT AT A ROUND table in a big room, holding cards, looking contented or bored. Donahue was considering a pair of aces showing, with a third in the hole, and the chunky blond was dealing. A bottle and glasses were on the table, and cigarette smoke writhed and slithered beneath the chandelier.

Pete yelled down the hallway from the front door: "It's just Sergeant Uhl and a couple o' boys."

"Pair of aces bets," said the blond.

"Pair of aces bets two blues," said Donahue.

A small man in a gray velour hat appeared unostentatiously in the doorway and regarded the gathering with mild blue eyes. He had a white mustache, gently inquisitive eyebrows. Two big men, younger, bulked behind him, hands in pockets significantly. The small man had his fingers loosely locked behind his back.

"Oh, hello there, Sergeant!" greeted the tall thin man, leaning back, saluting.

"Hello, Shadd," Uhl said softly. "I just thought I'd drop around and see who was living here. It's a nice night out."

"So they tell me."

Uhl looked slowly around the table. "Just a friendly little gathering."

"Won't you have a drink?"

"I never touch it, Shadd. My liver can't stand it any more. This is a nice quiet place you have. Sort of off the beaten paths. It used to be a farm here, didn't it?"

"Believe it was—at one time."

"Yes, yes," Uhl drawled, "it is a very nice place."

"You don't get out this way much, do you, Sergeant?"

"No, I don't, Shadd. And I like the country, too. So does my wife, Ella. . . . Now, Charlie, take your hand out of your pocket. I'm not going to hurt you."

"I was fishin' for a match," Charlie blurted.

Shadd, the tall man, slid a black look towards Charlie.

Uhl went on drawling monotonously: "We're only on a tail. A man named Jansen was killed a little while ago down on Lindell Boulevard and we thought—no offense, Shadd—we just thought you might know something about it."

"Gosh, Sarge, I'm sorry—we don't," Shadd said.

"A man in the house next door heard the shots and ran out in time to see a black sedan draw up. Two men jumped in the sedan and it headed west. It had Oklahoma pads. I noticed outside that you've got Missouri pads, but it was a sedan like yours. I noticed your engine's warm."

"I just came in a little while ago," Shadd said. "Did the car come out this way?"

"The man next door called Headquarters and the dispatcher flashed a description of the car to all outlying districts. The car was supposed to have come in this direction."

Donahue said: "Say, before Shadd and the boys came back, I heard a car go by. I looked out the window and I swear it was doing better than sixty. It was a big sedan. I couldn't tell whether it was black or dark blue."

"I guess they're heading west," Uhl said sadly. Then: "Well, we'll get along, Shadd. I'm glad to find you liking it out here. It's healthier than in the city . . . you know, Shadd?" Uhl almost winked; he smiled gently, said: "Well, we'll be going then. Come on, boys."

Donahue stood up. "You heading back for the city, Sergeant?"

"Yes."

"Mind giving me a lift?" "Only too glad to."

Donahue shrugged into his raglan, smiling around the table. He could almost feel the current of suspicion, of brooding fear, that pulsed in the men. "I'll be seeing you, boys," he said lightly. He rolled out with the plain-clothes men into the windy darkness. They crossed a grubby lawn, passing between two huge oaks, and reached the gravel highway. A man was waiting by a big touring car, the red end of a cigarette incarnadining his nose.

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"You can ride in the back," Uhl told Donahue kindly. One of the detectives climbed in front beside the chauffeur, and Uhl joined Donahue and the other detective in the rear. Uhl stowed away two Thompson sub-machine guns in a compartment back of the front seat; they had been lying on the floor. The driver turned the car about and the big machine roared back towards the city. Donahue took in landmarks carefully.

"He was killed in the basement," Uhl said wearily. "Shot once in the chest, once in the head. He was an old man. The Edgecomb place. Edgecomb went West—or South—for a couple of months. You know him, of course: he's a brilliant lawyer." He turned towards Donahue in the dark windy tonneau. "You're a stranger here, aren't you?"

"Yes, kind of."

"H'm, I thought so. ... Not too fast, Eddie. Some bad curves along here."

Donahue got off at Olive Street and Twelfth Boulevard. He walked rapidly to the Apollo and entered a deserted lobby. He stopped at the desk to ask if any telegrams had arrived; there had not; he ascended beside a sleepy elevator boy and went directly to his room. He took off hat and raglan, felt gingerly of the bump on his head, winced, swore softly, and took a long shot of Scotch straight. For a moment he paced up and down with long heavy strides, slamming fist into palm slowly, time and time again.

Then he went down the hall and knocked at Herron's door. It opened almost immediately, and he walked in. Herron closed the door, locked it. He was still dressed; anxiety and eagerness showed in his face.

"You didn't get it——"

"I got it," clipped Donahue, "but I had to plant it out back of the house. And what a sweet mess I piled into! Bodyguard? Hell!" He dropped to a chair and related briefly what had happened.

"And Jansen was killed!" exclaimed Herron.

"So Uhl says. And let me tell you that Uhl is a pretty foxy dick. One of those quiet guys. But he's got a head on his shoulders."

Herron blinked. "And Shadd! Shadd is the one! Shadd and his rats! They were waiting, eh? They didn't believe that I had left town. And poor Jansen—— It's outrageous, Mr. Donahue! Why didn't you tell Uhl?"

Donahue scowled. "I made a bargain with Shadd. Uhl's no dumb bunny. He'll get them."

"But a bargain with Shadd——"

"Was a bargain," broke in Donahue. "Those guys might have socked and planted me away before Uhl and his men came in. Don't you worry about my end of it. I'll get that black box. One bad thing——Shadd knows where I'm staying. They frisked me and I had the hotel key in my pocket,"

"That is bad, Mr. Donahue, that is bad."

"I'll admit it's not rosy, but what the hell. Those guys would have a swell job on their hands trying to crash this hotel."

Herron made a sweeping gesture. "Don't think that we are through with them yet! Evidently Uhl hasn't a shred of evidence. It was just blind luck that brought him to that house in the country. They will still try to get that evidence. Even now they may be watching the hotel, watching what move you will make next."

Donahue scoffed. "Don't you believe it. They'll lay low for a couple of days at least. They'll think that I might have squealed. They'll watch their tricks for a while. It's almost certain they were keeping an eye on your house, and it's just as certain that if you'd gone out there you wouldn't be alive now to tell about it."

"Believe me, Mr. Donahue, I am very grateful."

"You can let that slide. You paid for that service. And I'm thanking my stars I got off with only a crack on the konk. Just rest at ease. Temporarily you're out of danger. As a matter of fact, you can go out, make your official appearance, and do what you please. The time would be ripe right now to plant Shadd and his guns. You say you've got a lot of important data. In a pinch, I can swear that I heard them say they'd changed license plates. And I can swear they entered your house."

Herron's eyes danced brightly, reflectively. "By Godfrey, perhaps you're right! Indeed I think you are right, Mr. Donahue!"

"I planted the box behind the shrubbery by that rear wall. I can go out just before dawn and get it."

Herron shook his head. "That would be too dangerous, Mr. Donahue, leave it there. I think it will be safe. In the morning, after I have had some sleep I shall decide on a course of action. And remember, I am depending on you to stand by me."

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Donahue stood up. “Naturally. And I think I’ll hit the hay myself.”..

Herron grasped his hand. “You have practically saved my life, Mr. Donahue. I am deeply grateful. Let us have breakfast at——say——ten tomorrow morning, in here. Eh?”

“Only omit the grapefruit,” Donahue said.

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### V

AT NINE-THIRTY Donahue awoke, yawned, swung out of bed and took a cold shower. He shaved and dressed, took a look out of the window and saw the inevitable pall of smoke and fog hanging over the city, in the streets.

Whistling, feeling bright and chipper, he went down the hall and rapped on 804. The door opened and a Negro maid looked out.

"Mr. Herron in?" Donahue said.

"Ah's just cleanin' up, suh. Party checked out o' heah."

"Checked out?"

"Yassuh."

"Thank you."

Donahue retraced his steps down the hall, not whistling, and looking very dark and somber. He swung into his room, closed the door, and stood with feet spread, arms jammed against hips. He nibbled tightly at his lower lip. His eyes became round and hard, staring fixedly at the carpet.

He chopped off a short oath, put on hat and raglan, went downstairs and out into the street. He called the hotel from a cigar store at the corner. Asked for Mr. Herron. Mr. Herron had checked out at seven that morning. Donahue hung up savagely, went out lighting a cigarette, knew that cigarettes didn't agree with him before breakfast, and snapped it away. He entered a lunch-room and ordered tomato juice, poached eggs on toast and coffee. He ate vigorously but with no great appetite. Finished, he roamed the streets, walking swiftly, seemingly with purpose but actually without it. In that manner, he was surprised to find himself at length in front of the Apollo, and entered.

He was striding across the lobby when Uhl rose placidly from a divan and laid down a rumpled copy of the Globe-Democrat.

"Good morning, Donahue," he said, smiling.

Donahue stopped short, his scalp contracting, a scowl starting on his —forehead. But on second thought he grinned, said: "Oh, hello, Sergeant."

Uhl was alone, his hat in his hand, his white hair thick and bushy. "I would like to have a few words with you—— in your room."

"Sure thing. Come on."

When they were in Donahue's room, Uhl seemed oddly embarrassed for a moment, turning his hat round and round in his neat white hands.

"Sit down," Donahue urged.

"Yes——thanks."

Uhl sat down and said: "I'm sorry you didn't tell me last night that you were an Interstate operative. I think pretty highly of your agency."

Donahue started. If Uhl's knowing he was a guest at the Apollo had startled Donahue, this second revelation was a distinct shock. But Donahue appeared to take it like an old campaigner. He even chuckled.

"Take it from me, Sergeant, the only thing I was worrying about last night——or this morning, rather——was getting away with my guts intact. I wouldn't fool you a bit."

Uhl nodded understandingly, then went on: "I hope your head is better, too."

"You know things, don't you, Sergeant?"

"Through no fault of mine, Donahue. I suppose you were surprised to find your client gone this morning."

Donahue sat down suddenly on the bed. "I like you, Uhl."

"Thank you. Can you spare the time to go out to Edgecomb's house with me to show me where the black box is?"

"A command in the form of a question, eh?"

"Well"——Uhl smiled modestly——"you know how it is."

Uhl had his own flivver downstairs, which he drove himself. Donahue sat beside him on the way out. When

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they drew up before the towered house on Lindell Boulevard a policeman came towards them. Uhl told him to stay by the car.

Donahue led the way into the grounds behind the house, through the arbor.

"I always wanted a garden like this," Uhl remarked dreamily. "But it costs money."

"I was born in a hotel," Donahue said.

He reached the shrubbery, no indecision in his movements. He searched for a couple of minutes, his face falling. Finally he stood up and faced Uhl, shrugged and shook his head.

"It's gone."

Uhl looked suddenly sad. "No, is it?"

"It's gone. I planted it right there, alongside that vine that comes down the wall."

"Pshaw," Uhl drawled.

Donahue began thrashing through the shrubbery, inspired by anger more than by a belief that he would find the box. Finally he stopped and came back towards Uhl wearing a brown scowl.

"What's the lowdown, Sergeant?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, how is it you know so much about what happened last night? Did you go out to that place in the country again and make a pinch?"

"No," Uhl said. "I didn't do anything. Your client called me up this morning. Mr. Edgecomb called me up and explained in detail. He said something had happened that made him leave the hotel abruptly. He called from a West End public booth and told me that I should communicate with him tonight or tomorrow morning at the Rex Hotel, in Kansas City."

"Why the devil did he do that?"

He explained his hiding incognito in the Apollo and asked me to keep it a secret. He was a lot concerned over you and asked me if I would look you up and go out with you to get the box. He said you would swear that Shadd and his mob had beaten you up, taken the key and gone back to the house to look for certain important papers. I've heard a lot about Edgecomb. He's an honest lawyer. He was supposed to have left by car for Hot Springs some days ago because this mob was out to take his life. And by the way, he left an envelope with the clerk at the Apollo for you. A little gift, I suppose."

Donahue was searching Uhl's face intently. "Edgecomb's got a good reputation here, hasn't he?"

"None better. Why?"

"Well, I was just wondering if he's entirely on the up and up. Take it from me, Sergeant, this is one of the queerest cases I've ever tackled—and I've had a lot in my time."

Uhl thought for a moment. "The only answer I see, Donahue, is that Shadd's boys came back here again, maybe thinking that you might have planted the box somewhere. One of them might have tailed you to the hotel——"

"They knew where I was staying. Edgecomb——or Herron, as he was down on the books——didn't like that a bit."

"One of Shadd's men probably tailed you, planted himself in the hall, and maybe listened at the door while you were talking with your client. That's logical, isn't it?"

"I guess it is." But Donahue was not emphatic. His brown eyes wandered thoughtfully.

Uhl sighed. "Anyhow," he said, "I guess I have a perfect right to collect Shadd and his boys. You'll testify, won't \_ you, Donahue?"

"What else can I do? Edgecomb may be a swell lawyer, but he's certainly afraid of his precious skin."

"Let's go down to Headquarters," Uhl said. On the way Donahue stopped at the hotel. The envelope his client had left contained a hundred dollars.

He met the police car in front of Headquarters, on Twelfth Boulevard. Uhl was there, quiet, retiring. Smiddy was at the wheel. There were three other men in plain—clothes: Knoblock, Reems and Brannigan. Donahue squeezed in front beside Uhl and Smiddy. The big Packard, rated at a hundred miles an hour, headed west on Olive Street. The wind hammered the top and the side curtains. They followed Route 40 through the city and kept to it on the outskirts.

"You were out here last summer, weren't you?" Brannigan asked.

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“Yes,” said “Donahue. “And last winter. Every time I come out here I get in trouble.”

“Don't go too fast now, Burt,” Uhl said. “Time enough when we have to.”

The big car was doing fifty past bare fields. The curtains clapped in the grip of the cold wind, and the men in the rear kept pounding their feet on the floor to keep warm. “Turn off here, Burt,” Uhl said.

Smiddy swung into a crushed gravel road that met the state highway obliquely. The tires ground on the gravel; gravel drummed against the undersides of the mudguards; dust ballooned behind. The road was wide, smooth, and the car passed scattered farmhouses and went through small sleeping towns that looked run down and hopeless.

The road rose slightly, then dipped in a long straight run between sparse timber. It curved beyond, and Uhl pointed to the big weather-beaten farmhouse ahead, on the right, set back fifty yards from the road.

“There may be trouble,” Uhl said. “Burt, drive past and then pull up alongside those woods just beyond.” The big car swished past the house and skidded to a stop in the lee of the woods. Donahue and Uhl got out. The three men sat in the back holding Thompson guns. Uhl leaned in.

“You boys stay here for the time being. Burt, I guess you'd better come with me. Donahue, you stay out of sight. Well, come on, 'Burt.”

Uhl and Smiddy walked slowly across the grubby lawn and climbed three steps to the ramshackle veranda. Uhl knocked. He waited patiently, listening. He said something to Smiddy and Smiddy left the veranda and went around to the rear. Uhl kept knocking at intervals. Smiddy returned shaking his head.

Uhl drew his gun and knocked the panes out of a window. He and Smiddy went in. Five minutes later they came out and returned to the car.

“They're gone,” Uhl said sadly. “But I want you to stay out here, Brannigan, in case they come back. Stay in the woods. If they come back, walk to the nearest town—it's only two miles—and telephone in.”

On the way back to the state highway, which was distant eight miles from the house, Uhl stopped in several towns and asked questions. It was in the third town that he came back to the car smiling quietly.

“A big black Cadillac sedan, coming from the country, stopped at the filling station at ten this morning to load her tank. There were six men in it. One of them tallies with Shadd. They left headed for the state highway, speeding. The man at the filling station remembers the car had Illinois pads, because after he filled the tank he dusted off the rear plate. He doesn't remember the number, though. Ten to one' they're flying west right now. Hit the highway, Burt, and go west.”

At the entrance to the St. Charles Bridge across the Missouri River, the ticket agent remembered a similar Cadillac sedan. It had crossed the bridge at about ten-thirty. The Packard crossed the bridge, went through St. Charles, and struck Route 40.

“You can let her out,” Uhl said.

Smiddy jammed his foot down on the throttle and the car roared at eighty miles an hour, its siren screaming at intervals. The men sat motionless while trees and fields whipped past. At the first important crossroads, Uhl called a halt.

“I want to telephone ahead,” he said, “and have the news relayed. A black Cadillac sedan, with six men and Illinois plates.”

He telephoned from a pretentious filling station and then came back, told Smiddy to keep to Route 40.

A mile east of Wentzville Donahue suddenly said: “Hey, pull up!”

Smiddy looked across at him.

“Pull up!” Donahue yelled above the beating of the wind.

Smiddy took his foot off the throttle and applied the brakes gradually. The Packard bumped gently on the frozen shoulder alongside the road.

“There was a car parked in a lane back there,” Donahue said. “I think it had bullet holes in the rear.”

“You have eyes, you have,” Uhl said. “Turn around, Burt.”

It was a narrow lane that met the highway at right angles. Bushes grew thickly on either side of it. The Packard swung in and stopped behind an empty Lincoln sedan.

“By——, you're right!” Reems said.

The men piled out and stopped by the Lincoln. Donahue jabbed six bullet holes with his finger.

“There's baggage inside,” Uhl said. “No glass broken. And I don't see any blood.”

Donahue hauled out a yellow suitcase and tipped it on the ground. “Take a look at these initials: S. E.”



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"It looks," drawled Uhl, "as if they got Edgecomb."

"He was a fool to have left the hotel!" Donahue snapped.

They searched the ground around the car, finding nothing of consequence.

"I'll telephone Jeff City," Uhl said, "and check up on these plates. Knoblock, you drive the Lincoln. We'll go up to Wentzville."

Nobody had heard any shooting in Wentzville.

Uhl came out of a restaurant and said: "It's Edgecomb's car all right. I just telephoned."

Reems looked out of the Lincoln. "His bags are opened. Doesn't look as if there was any ransacking."

Donahue was looking through the bags too. Every piece of linen was spotlessly clean. ——

"His body'll probably turn up along the road somewhere," Reems offered.

Donahue got out of the Lincoln, lit a cigarette and stared transfixed at its red end. A puzzled shadow moved slowly across his forehead, and his lean strong fingers began to tremble, his eyes suddenly became round and hard like brown bright marbles.

## Six Deadly Dames

### VI

AT SIX THAT EVENING Uhl called Donahue at his hotel.

Shadd and his five men had run into trouble in Jefferson City, where they had stopped to put water in the radiator. One of the attendants at the filling station went inside while another was filling the radiator and telephoned the authorities. The county sheriff happened to be only a block or so away and he came down with three deputies and some police.

They stopped the Cadillac just as it was starting. The driver tried to speed up, but a deputy cracked him with a gun and the car ran into a tree. Shadd and his men piled out dragging two Thompson guns with them, and warning the law officers to clear out. Shadd had one of the Tommy guns.

A deputy shot him through the thigh and in a minute all the guns were in action. The gangsters were outnumbered. One of the Tommy guns jammed after having put twelve bullets in an officer and another officer emptied his gun at the assassin. The gunfight lasted three minutes, and all six gunmen were killed.

They had had fifteen hundred dollars among them. However, no black metal box was found. It was natural to assume that they had thrown that away. But there were no papers, either, though there too it was natural to assume that they had destroyed them.

Since it was likely that they had kept to Route 40 at least as far as the town of Mexico, parties were on the hunt for the discarded body of Stanley Edgecomb. Bus drivers and motorists were asked to keep an eye out also. Circumstances pointed unwaveringly to the fact that Stanley Edgecomb had been attacked in his car, taken in the gangsters' car, relieved of important documents, then killed and thrown out somewhere between Wentzville and the town of Mexico, or between Mexico and the State capital.

Uhl concluded: "This case has many strange ramifications, Donahue, and it's going to take us a while to clear it up. Already there's a lot of people saying that maybe Edgecomb was not all that he was supposed to be. Kind of insinuating, you know, that he might have had his fingers in a dirty piece of pie. Are you staying—in town a while?"

"Yes. There are a few things I'd like to clean up for my own satisfaction. I'll be seeing you, Sergeant."

He hung up and drained the highball he had started on before Uhl telephoned.

There was a knock on the door and Donahue let in the hotel's head porter, a gaunt old man in a blue flannel shirt.

The head porter said "No, Mr. Herron didn't send down any clothes to be laundered while he was here."

"You would have handled the clothes whether they went to the hotel laundry or an outside one?"

"Yes. If they go to an outside one, the man in the receiving room pays the bill when they're delivered back and then collects from the cashier, who would put it on the guest's bill."

"Thanks," Donahue said, and dismissed the man with a quarter.

Then he returned to a collection of train and bus timetables, studied them intently, made a few notations. He telephoned the St. Louis terminal of the Central States Motor Express, spoke briefly and hung up. Then he telephoned Union Station and got a reservation on the 11:55 p.m. train for Kansas City.

At ten-forty he checked out of the Apollo, carrying his bag. A taxi ran him over to Union Station. It was raining when the Wabash train pulled out at midnight.

It was raining in Kansas City next morning. Donahue had checked his bag in the station, had gotten there in the chill early morning.

When he entered the Central States Motor Express waiting room, he said: "Will Nixon be in soon?"

"You mean Sam Nixon?"

"I mean the man who was chauffeur on your through bus from St. Louis yesterday that arrived after dark last night."

"He's out in that bus you see through that door. He's due to leave in half an hour."

Donahue went out through the door. "Mr. Nixon, I'd like to speak with you in private for a minute."

"Who, me?"

"I'm just a private cop on a tail. Come on."

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They went back of the bus. Donahue said: "You made a stop at Wentzville yesterday, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"How many passengers did you pick up?"

"Three. A couple for Mexico and one for here."

"The man for here——what did he look like?"

"Hell, I can't remember exactly. Fat guy, I think. Glasses.

Had a suitcase along. Or maybe he didn't have glasses."

"But," Donahue said, "he was the only man who got on at Wentzville destined for here."

"Yeah, I'm sure of that. What's the matter?"

"I don't know yet," Donahue said. "I'm trying to find out."

He went around to the taxi stand. Three cabs were there. The drivers had not been on duty last night when Nixon's bus arrived. However, Donahue got the names of those who had been. From the taxi company's garage he got their telephone numbers. He spent twenty minutes telephoning.

Then he took a taxi to the Hotel Bretton-Palace. The big lobby was noisy. It was a travelers' hotel. Donahue went directly to the desk and asked for the house officer. A page took him down a corridor and into an office. A small bald man blinked sky-blue eyes, dismissed the page.

Donahue sat down and produced identification.

"Oh, yeah, I've heard of you," the house officer said.

"I came right in here," Donahue said, "so I could put my cards on the table. I'm on a quiet little tail. It would be doing me a great favor, if you'd go out, look at the register for last night, and get me a list of names of men who arrived and registered here between six-fifteen and six-forty-five."

The house officer blinked. "No rough stuff on the premises."

"Nothing like that."

"Wait here."

Five minutes later the house officer came back into the office holding a memorandum as if reluctant to hand it over. "Remember, no rough stuff."

"Not if I can help it."

"Six men. I didn't take the women's names. Six men. I guess they were from that St. Louis bus. Here."

Donahue eyed the list closely. Room numbers were beside the names. All the names were strange.

"Look here," Donahue said, "do me another favor. Have a girl call these rooms, one by one, and let me listen in on an extension."

"I wouldn't want to get in any trouble," the house officer demurred, ill at ease.

"Be a good scout," Donahue urged. "And you won't get in any trouble. There's an unemployment drive on. Get a girl and have her ask these men over the phone if they will contribute. Anything for a stall. Just so I can hear their voices."

"Hell, I'd lose my job if the manager——Besides, there's no jane around here I'd care to trust. You know janes."

Donahue shrugged. "All right, then: never mind. I'll make the calls myself and take a chance."

He went out into the lobby, entered a booth and began calling the rooms. He said he was on the committee of the new drive to relieve the suffering of homeless men. Could he come up and collect a small donation? He tried to keep ' his voice in falsetto. Two of the rooms did not answer. One man refused to contribute and bawled Donahue out 'for calling. Donahue did not make the sixth call. The fifth was sufficient.

Stepping out of the booth, he saw the house officer leaning against one of the marble pillars at the other end of the lobby. Donahue crossed to him.

"Please, now," he said, "don't mastermind around after me."

"Only no rough stuff," the bald man said, worried.

Donahue strode to the elevators, went up to the sixth floor. He walked down a red-carpeted corridor, turned sharp right and followed another corridor. He stopped in front of a door marked 645 and knocked.

A voice said: "Who is there, eh?"

"Just Donahue."

"Donahue!"

## Six Deadly Dames

“On the level.”

Silence.

Then—— “Well, well, this——this is extraordinary, Mr. Donahue!” The door whipped open and Donahue's recent client bubbled buoyantly on the threshold, saying: “Pon my word! Well, well, come right in——come right in, Mr. Donahue. It has been something of a travail for me.” He locked the door.

Donahue moved squinted eyes around the room, said absently: “I suppose it has been. Your Lincoln was riddled all right.”

“Indeed it was! By Godfrey, Mr. Donahue, I shall never be the same man again!”

“I wondered why you took the bus from Wentzville, leaving your car parked down the road, hardly a mile, and with all your baggage in it.”

“My dear man, wasn't I attacked? Do you suppose I was going to linger around that spot?”

“I see you registered here as Baldwin Coombs of Indianapolis.”

“A very original name, eh? Eh, Mr. Donahue?”

“You're a very original man. I'm not. I'm just a plain everyday guy trying to make a living——as honestly as possible. There's not a hell of a lot of romance attached to my business. I'm no drawing-room cop. One day I'm here——the next day, somewhere else. That's not romance. It's damned monotonous. When I take on a client, I expect a break. I expect the truth. If it is the truth, I'm just as liable to risk my neck for the guy as not. I'm a nice guy ordinarily. But when a man two-times on me, I'm a louse——the lousiest kind of a louse you ever ran across. Understand?”

“Why, yes——of course. But what is the point, eh? Eh, what is the point? After all——”

Donahue snarled: “After all, you two-timed! You're not Edgecomb. You never were Edgecomb. That baggage in the Lincoln was not your baggage. It was Edgecomb's. But you were driving that Lincoln. Edgecomb wasn't in it. You were never attacked, either. You drove the car in that lane, put the bullets in yourself. You walked the mile to Wentzville and boarded the bus and arrived here between six and six-, thirty last night.

“Shadd and his mob were fogged down in Jeff City. They had nothing on them. The theory was——I didn't hold it—— that Shadd and his men overtook you and mobbed you, chucked your body out somewhere farther on. I began to smell other things when we opened the baggage in the Lincoln. Every stitch was clean. I figured that a man who had made a quick getaway, like yours, would at least have a dirty shirt along, you had plenty, I imagine, because you sent out no laundry in the five days you were at the hotel.”

The other clapped his hands gently. “Very, very good, Mr. Donahue. As I said once before, you are a man of parts. Indeed, that you are, Mr. Donahue. I should like to hear some more about it. But, please, if I am not Stanley Edgecomb, who am I? By Godfrey, there is a splendid side of the ridiculous to this: having assumed so many aliases, I find it hard to recapture my real name. Droll, don't you think? Eh?”

Donahue's brown face looked hawkish, predatory, keenly alert. “You may think you can song and dance yourself out of this, mister, but you can't.”

“Eh?”

“I'm taking you back to St. Louis.”

“Of course, Mr. Donahue. I intend going. I shall engage a drawing room for both of us. Let me see——I had a timetable——in my overcoat.” He picked a blue overcoat up from a divan, rummaged in the pockets. Then he dropped the coat and turned around holding a small automatic, smiling buoyantly. “You will keep your hands well up, Mr. Donahue.”

Donahue twisted his lips in a sneer. “This won't get you anywhere, you——!”

“Language, Mr. Donahue!”

Donahue shoved his hip against the telephone and deliberately knocked it to the floor.

“Pick that up,” the fat man said.

“Pick it up yourself.”

“Pick that up. You knocked it down.”

“Horsefeathers,” Donahue chided. “If you want it picked up, then pick it up. I knocked it down because I wanted it knocked down. You want it picked up. Okey. Pick it up. You better hurry up. Operator may think there's a murder going on up here.”

“It's wedged between the table and the wall. You will have to bend way over to get it.”

## Six Deadly Dames

“You mean,” Donahue said, “*you* will.”

“I am no longer fooling, Mr. Donahue!”

Donahue shrugged. “Neither am I. You're not going to get anywhere with me, mister. You're not going to threaten me. Oh, no you're not. You're not going to shoot me and make a lot of noise with the telephone disconnected. You're not going to be a jackass like that.”

“Mr. Donahue, pick up that telephone.”

Donahue lowered his hands, chafed them together, smiling with utmost self-assurance. He turned and walked to the door, his back to the man and the gun. He unlocked the door.

“Mr. Donahue!”

Donahue palmed the knob, about faced, bowed with mock courtesy. “I'll be waiting for you. And I'd advise you, mister—spare the rod. You're in bad enough as it is. Besides, I promised the house dick there'd be no rough stuff.”

The fat man stood like a man petrified, staring wide-eyed through his horn-rimmed glasses. For a brief moment he looked oafish, stripped of guile; looked like a man trying hard to believe what his eyes and ears transmitted to his brain; and believing it, in spite of himself, and still incredulous of his own intelligence.

Donahue, eyeing him levelly, turned the knob, opened the door behind him.

The glaze left the fat man's eyes; it was like windows thrown suddenly upward.

“Remember: spare the rod,” Donahue said.

The fat man emitted a groan. His gun drooped. The actor had disintegrated; the man was present now, humble, flushing, fearful, prey to encroaching terror.

“Will you step to one side, Donahue?”

Donahue ducked, half-whirled.

Sergeant Uhl stood in the doorway, placid and sad, holding a big gun in his hand. Back of him stood the house officer.

“It was funny about that phone,” Uhl said, smiling.

Donahue growled: “How the hell did you get here?”

“Oh, I've been behind you since the time you left St. \_ Louis. I thought you might get in trouble. Is that Mr. Edgecomb?”

“That,” said Donahue, “is liable to be anybody.”

Uhl sighed. “Yes, Silkhat Willems always was known for inventing swell aliases.”

“Is that his name?”

“It was the name he started with.”

“Hell,” Donahue said, “this isn't even funny any more.”

“No. I never found anything humorous about murder.”

Donahue looked at him. “Who's been murdered now?”

“Stanley Edgecomb was murdered,” Uhl said, drawing out manacles. “Quite a few days ago.”

## Six Deadly Dames

### VII

POLICE HEADQUARTERS, St. Louis. . . .

Donahue sat on a desk, dangling one leg, when Uhl opened the door and came in wearily. It was after midnight, and the Sergeant, not a young man, looked pale and haggard—but still placid.

“It’s all over now—practically,” he said.

He let himself slowly down into a swivel-chair, drew out an old briar, began stuffing it. His gentle eyes had a faraway look.

“So he came through,” Donahue muttered.

Uhl nodded. “Yes, he came through. He murdered Edge-comb.”

Donahue got off the desk, paced up and down with long angry strides; stopped, flung up a fist. “And I was working for that guy!” He brought the fist swishing down. “I knew it, Uhl. By—I sensed everything was not on the up and up! But I had to go along with him. He was smooth, Uhl—he was smooth. I was a gofor. He pulled the wool all over my eyes.”

“Silkhat Willems has always been a smooth crook. It was his first murder. But the stakes were big. He must have thought it was worth the chance. But think of it: almost a hundred thousand dollars.”

Donahue laughed mirthlessly. “And he had me believing they were important legal papers, notes; data.”

“Whereas,” Uhl smiled, “they were emeralds. Edgecomb picked them up for a song a year ago, in Siam. Willems has been an international card sharp and con man for years. He was in Siam at the time and made a note of the sale. He came here to get the emeralds. He laid pretty careful plans. He struck up an acquaintanceship with Shadd in the Lido, a gambling house in the country, and got Shadd to throw in with him. He then called on Edgecomb. He had a lot of front, you know, and it was easy for him to pose as a globe trotter. He said he was on his way to California. He remarked about the sale in Siam, and Edgecomb was fool enough to show him the emeralds. Conditions being what they are and have been for a year, Edgecomb was holding the emeralds till better times would warrant a better price. He wasn’t feeling well, and spoke of going to Hot Springs. Willems so planned their meetings that nobody ever saw them together.

“Shadd was to get the emeralds, and there was to be a fifty-fifty split. Remember, Willems had never killed a man before. But then Shadd and Willems got into an argument. Willems wanted to break. He was finding Shadd a hard man to boss. But Shadd wouldn’t have anything of it.

“Willems got desperate. He worked himself into getting a ride from Edgecomb as far as Hot Springs. Edgecomb picked him up in the car. Willems wanted those emeralds. He knew they were in the house. He attacked Edgecomb in the car, choked him senseless, threw his body in the river, weighted with stones, came back in the car himself, put it in a garage, became Mr. Herron at the Apollo.

“The killing hit him hard. He had the keys to the house, he had the combination, but he was afraid it would mean another killing. Besides, Shadd was looking for him. So Willems got the idea of getting you.

“You ran into trouble. You got the box, planted it in the garden. While you were sleeping, Willems went out and got the box himself, just before dawn. He made that call on me. He also called Shadd’s house in the country and said that the police were going out there on a hot tip. Shadd and his men beat it, for they’d killed Jansen, the caretaker. Willems figured that we’d spend all our time hunting Shadd. He knew someone would find the Lincoln he drove out in. Willems, of course, drove it off the road and put the shots in it. That would make us believe that Shadd had overtaken Edgecomb. As a matter of fact, it did. Up until the time I called Headquarters here when I arrived in Kansas City, I thought Edgecomb was still alive and knew nothing about Willems. And I knew nothing of Willems until I looked at him while you were standing in the door of his hotel room in Kansas City.”

Donahue put his head in his hands, made a sour face. “It’s sure going to take me a long while to get back my self-respect.”

“Nonsense, Donahue. You really caught Willems, didn’t you?”

“Where did they find Edgecomb’s body?”

Uhl winked. “They didn’t find it. A man in a boat picked . up a toupee. It took them an hour to find the place that made it. The place identified it as belonging to Edgecomb. That was enough to make Willems confess.”

## Six Deadly Dames

Donahue reached for his hat. "Come on back to the hotel and sock a bottle of Scotch with me."

"I'd like to, but my liver can't stand it."

"Okey. Then it means looking-glass drinking for me. I'm going to get plastered and then I'm going to call my boss on long distance."

"What, a new case?"

Donahue laughed. "Hell, no. By the time I get through telling him what I think of him, young Donahue will probably be out of a job."

"I wouldn't do that."

"I wouldn't either," Donahue said, "if I stayed sober. That's why I want to get plastered! . . . Well, toodle-oo, Uhl."

## Pearls Are Tears

DONAHUE came in with his ulster open, the collar negligently turned up. A snap-brim tan felt leaned over one ear. He elbowed the door shut and stood for a moment leaning against it, a droll half-smile hovering on his wide, good-humored mouth.

“Your humble servant, Mike,” he said.

Mueck moved forward in the carved mahogany chair and laid smooth white hands on the green desk blotter, palms down, fingers splayed. He bowed with his blond leonine head; his gray eyes twinkled; he lifted one side of his mouth in a sly, jovial leer.

“Same old Donny.”

“Same old Mike, only”——Donahue looked around——“considerably more prosperous.” He dropped into a chair facing Mueck, lit a cigarette, blew smoke towards the ceiling. “Well, counselor?”

Mueck was a striking figure of a man, even while sitting. With his fingers clasped, he rubbed the heels of his hands slowly together, regarded Donahue with a bland look.

“I didn't want to speak too much with Hinkle over the phone,” he said. “It's a delicate matter. For me.”

“How much is in it?”

“Five hundred.”

“For you and us?”

Mueck shook his head. “I get nothing, Donny.”

Donahue scoffed with his brown eyes.

“Honest,” Mueck insisted quietly.

The two men eyed each Other steadily. Then Donahue shrugged and gushed smoke through his nostrils.

“All right, Mike.”

“You've got to believe me in that, Donny. You know, or ought to know, that I've always been on the level with you. I asked Hinkle to send you over because I believe I can depend on you——implicitly.”

“What's troubling you, Mike?”

“Do you remember the Jennifer jewel theft——six months ago?”

“That old eccentric dame who lost her fifty-thousand-dollar necklace?”

“Yes. But stolen. Not just lost. Well, Mrs. Jennifer happens to be a client of mine. She had me come over last night. She was, well, all of a-twitter.” Mueck picked up a pencil. “She has a chance of recovering that necklace——for twenty thousand dollars. She's a paralytic, you know; never goes out of the house. A man called her up last night, offered to return the necklace for the sum I mentioned——and no questions asked.”

“Why don't you throw it to the cops, Mike?”

“Damn it, I wanted to, Donny! I talked myself blue in the face trying to dissuade her. But, no. The necklace has a great sentimental value. She is willing to pay the twenty thousand. The man who telephoned her wanted to make a rendezvous with her. Of course, she can't go out. She . told him to come to the house. He wouldn't hear of it. Then she said that she. would appoint an agent to carry out the deal, explaining to the man why she could not meet him. He agreed to this. She told him to call back this afternoon at five.”

Donahue said: “Well, why don't you act as her agent?”

“Please.” Mueck held up his hands. “You know damned well, Donny, that I wouldn't dare. I have my legal reputation to think of. If something happened during the course of the procedure, if the police got wind of it, I would stand a fine chance of being accused of compounding a felony. Besides, it is out of my line. But at the same time I feel a should try to humor my client. Hence you. She wants that pearl necklace and wants it bad. The cops disgusted her just after the robbery by running around a lot, drinking . her liquor, and finding out nothing. She doesn't want it to happen again.”

“And I'm supposed to take the twenty thousand, meet the crook, turn over the money and receive the necklace.”

“Yes——if you want to take the job.”

“It sounds like a soft snap.”



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“I won't say whether it is or not. I've put my cards on the table, and it's up to you. You can call on Mrs. Jennifer this afternoon, get the money and receive the instructions the man will give over the telephone.”

“I sure hate to turn over twenty thousand to a crook, Mike. It kind of runs against the grain.”

“The same with me. But you couldn't tell Mrs. Jennifer that. She wants the necklace, she's willing to pay for it.”

Donahue crushed out his butt. “It sounds so simple that I'll bet there will be a hitch somewhere. That necklace should have been fenced long ago.”

“The crook might be a first-timer. Maybe he couldn't find a fence. The necklace is well known, you know.”

Donahue said abruptly: “I'll take you on.”

“Good. But remember, Donny, I am not your client. I have nothing to do with this. Your client is Mrs. Jennifer. When you go around there she'll settle the bill.”

Donahue stood up, grinned. “Mike, I've never spoken to you about it.”

“I know I can depend on that, Donny.”

“You know little old me, counselor!”

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### II

HINKLE, the agency head, said: "How well do you know this Mueck?"

"We used to 'play duck on the rock together." Donahue sat at the desk opposite Hinkle in the Interstate office and counted crisp new bills. Hinkle eyed the bills reflectively.

"That's a lot of money, Donny. I hope this chap Mueck is strictly on the up and up."

"I know, Asa. If I had any doubts—hell, do you think I'd take this job?"

He shuffled the bills together, snapped a rubber band around them and slipped the lot into a heavy manila envelope. He put the packet in his inside pocket and buttoned his coat. He looked at his strap-watch. It was twenty to six.

"The old dame made me swear to be a nice boy," he said. "I shouldn't try to flimflam this crook out of his jack. Imagine! Well"—he shrugged, scowled—"it's her dough. Though it gives me a pain to do this."

"What time do you meet the crook?"

"At ten o'clock."

Hinkle wagged his head. "I certainly hope you don't get in trouble, Donny."

"What a swell moral support you turned out to be!"

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### III

DONAHUE LEANED AGAINST the mail-box on the corner, the belt of his ulster drawn in tightly, the gusty wind tussling

with his turned-up collar, snapping at the brim of his hat.

A street-light hung a wan glow over this Greenwich Village intersection, sometimes picking out Donahue's chin when he raised his head to peer searchingly.

It was a dark, dismal crossroad, blockaded by one- and two-storied houses, none of them pretentious; a meeting of the ways flanked by shadows, sapped by alleys, undermined by areaway speakeasies. Far away could be heard the sound of intermittent elevated trains; five minutes by foot, was Sheridan Square.

Donahue drummed his heels on the pavement. He was impatient as well as cold. It was half-past ten.

Suddenly a man appeared on the opposite side, stood motionless, his hands in his pocket, his face a blur beneath a yanked-down hat-brim. Almost imperceptibly Donahue tensed. Force of habit as well as the urge of precaution made his hand tighten on the gun in his pocket.

Abruptly the man started across towards Donahue, hard heels rapping the street, re-echoing.

"How the hell much longer are you going to hold up that mail-box, buddy?"

Donahue said nothing. He remained leaning against the green metal box, his chin buried in his collar, his eyes peering hard under the brim of his hat. Then suddenly, he chuckled, hove his chin out of the collar, showed his teeth in a crooked grin.

"How the hell long have you been watching me, Kiff?"

The plain-clothesman reared his head, craned his neck, shoved his jaw forward, squinted as he screwed up his compact mustache. Then he put hands on hips, rocked on his heels.

"So it's you, Donahue."

"How is every little thing, Kiff?"

They let it go at that for a minute, Donahue drumming his heels, wearing an amused smile, Kiff peering at him with hard little shiny eyes.

Then: "What are you waiting for, Donahue?"

"A date."

"In this neighborhood?"

"Sure."

"What's the matter with a bar? It's warmer."

"The jane doesn't like bars."

"Boloney!"

Donahue shrugged. "All right, Kiff. You see that dump over there? Well, a scrubwoman lives there. I'm going to rob her. Going to take her pennies away from her, Kiff. I'm sorry I lied to you about the jane, Kiff."

"Oh, that's all right." Kiff poked Donahue in the stomach, leering. "That's all right, kid. Well, hope you have luck with the pennies. I'll tell the copper on the beat to stay away."

Kiff laughed harshly, left a hard shiny look as he turned and swung off, heavy-heeled.

Donahue listened to the sound of the heels fading away. Then he exhaled a long-held breath, swore briefly. Silence and the wind again. Five minutes later the creaking of a door. A man was in the street, motionless, ten feet from Donahue.

A low mutter: "Hey, you!"

Donahue straightened, kept his hands in his pockets, started slowly towards the man.

"Yeah?" he said.

He noticed the suggestion of a crouch in the small man's attitude, the crook of his arm, the way his hand was rigid in the pocket of a blue jacket.

"Are you the guy?" the little man said.

"What kept you so long?"

"That dick's been snoopin' around. Heard you and him talkin'."

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“Where's the scatter?”

The little man jerked his head. “In here.”

Donahue went gingerly through a doorway one step above the sidewalk. A gas jet supplied mediocre light. The hallway was narrow, beads of damp, cold sweat stood out on yellow walls.

“Door at the” end,” muttered the little man. “Just open it.”

Donahue turned the knob and opened the door. A tall man with a patent-leather haircomb and dull eyes stood behind a table holding a gun. His face had the dry gray look of cigarette ash. He had a long goose-like neck, wore a tight white collar, tight dark clothes, long sideburns.

The small man slipped in behind Donahue and closed the door. He was rabbit-like in his movements.

“Okey, Eddie,” he said. “That shamus beat it.”

Eddie said to Donahue: “If you brought that shamus with you, guy, I'll turn your belly inside out.”

The little man blinked bright blue eyes in a chubby red face. “Hell, Eddie, he's okey. Ain't you heard him and the shamus?”

“Yeah,” Eddie said somberly, without conviction. “Show us the color of your dough, guy.”

“I've got it,” Donahue said. “Show me the color of the pearls.”

Eddie slipped a hand into his pocket, drew out a string of pearls, dangled them. Donahue stepped forward. Eddie drew the pearls in, lifted his lip wolf-like.

Donahue said: “I want to count them.”

Eddie laid them on the table, stepped back and leveled his gun at Donahue. Donahue, ignoring both men, picked the pearls up. He moved the string slowly through his fingers. There were fifty-two pearls. He then examined the settings and the clasp. He nodded, drew the packet from his pocket, and dropped it on the table.

Eddie snatched it up while the small man stood behind Donahue with a gun. Eddie ripped the packet open, scowling, and counted the bills swiftly. Still scowling, he crammed the bills into his pockets.

He jerked his head. “All right, bozo. Beat it.”

Donahue dropped the necklace into his pocket.

“Beat it!” snapped Eddie.

“Pipe down,” Donahue said. “It sure amazes me how a couple of punks like you get away with twenty grand.”

“Beat it!”

The small man opened the door.

Donahue bit his lip, wrinkled his forehead, looked from one to the other, exasperated, reluctant to go, to leave twenty thousand in hard cash with these punks. Not because he pitied Mrs. Jennifer. Not at all. It was just on general principles.

“Beat it, you! Beat it!”

“Ah-r-r! . . .” Donahue snarled, spun on his heel, his back to their guns; banged the room door savagely behind him; tramped down the hall, the pearls in his pocket, his job done practically—— Practically! He laughed bluntly to himself. Reached the hall door, put his hand on the knob, paused, thinking, deliberating, still reluctant to leave. But his job was done——done! His teeth lashed his nether lip. He swore, pulled open the door and stepped into the street. The wind slapped him in the face. He yanked down his hat, looking up and down the street; buried his face in the folds of his coat-collar. He waded through the wind, long-legged, rolling his shoulders.

“Make your date, Donny?”

Donahue stopped as he saw Kiff lounge from between two vacant store windows. Kiff was smoking a cigar. Kiff looked genial, jovial, hale-fellow-well-met. He shoved his chest out expansively, wobbled the cigar in the wind from one side of his mouth to the other; snorted as sparks showered back into his face; then was genial again, oddly blocking Donahue's path, turning sidewise to keep the wind from blowing his long coat between his legs. Light and shadow danced a windy saraband around him; his big horse teeth kept showing; the red cigar end hummed and sputtered in the wind.

“You playing tag or leap frog or something?” Donahue asked.

“Just tag.”

“All right, I'm it. Follow me.”

Donahue started around the precinct dick, boring his head into the wind.

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“Wait a minute, Donny.”

Still genial, still jovial, provocative. He twisted his blunt ; body to sideswipe and stop Donahue. Donahue lifted his hard jaw out of the coat-collar. He glared at Kiff. He looked angry, his brown face seemed strangely malevolent. Kiff grinned with his big horse teeth, a fixed grin, while he weaved his head to keep the wind out of his eyes.

“What the hell's on your mind, Kiff?”

“What's on yours, Donny?”

“Go to hell!”

Again Donahue started forward. Kiff, instead of blocking him, fell in beside him, flanking him closely, turning his cheek to the wind.—,

“You wouldn't be down in this neighborhood for your health, Donny. What's in that house, Donny?”

“A still.”

“Rats. They don't cook stuff in this neighborhood.”

“You know better, then.”

Kiff stopped, grabbing his hat as the wind uprooted it “I'll go back in and see, just in case, Donny.” Donahue stopped. The wind had made his eyes water. He dabbed at them.

“Why be a gofor, Kiff? Hell, are you hard up for a pinch?”

“Sure. The chief's been on our necks. A pinch is a pinch any kind of a pinch.” Kiff kept backing up towards the house, holding his hand to his hat, looking awkward as the wind pushed his coat between his legs.

Donahue said: “Wait, Kiff.” Went towards the precinct dick, gestured with his hand. “I went in there for a pinch myself, Kiff. That's straight. But I missed out. There's nothing in there. I was on a tail. I'll be frank with you.”

“Well, I'll go in anyhow, Donny.”

“Kiff, don't be weak-minded like that! It's nothing, I tell you. Just an idea I had.”

The little guy—and the guy with the sideburns—Eddie—in there. Both heeled. And Eddie had looked hopped up. A hot rod he'd be if Kiff went poking his nose in there. They'd smear Kiff all over the walls.

But Kiff kept backing up, then half-turned, moving sidewise towards the door. Donahue followed by fits and starts.

“It was just an idea I had, Kiff. I wanted to—. Hell, Kiff, don't be like that. It's a jane all right, but don't bust in. Don't pick on her. She's a friend of a friend of mine.” He crowded Kiff. “I'll go in first, Kiff, talk with her. I'll—”

It sounded silly. He knew it sounded silly. He felt his ears burning. The guy with the sideburns would cut Kiff down like nobody's business. Kiff was no great shakes as a gun artist. A snooper, Kiff was.

Kiff said: “First it's a jane—then it isn't a jane— Donahue! What do you take me for? You been hanging around that corner for something. I watched you. Then I find out it's you and I walk away. But I think—hell, he's up to something, that guy. I come back and you're gone.”

“Well, can't a man stand on a street corner?”—'

“I'm going in there, Donahue. I don't know but what you're hand in glove with a lot of heels. Roper always figured you for a two-timer—”

“Don't you call me a two-timer, you cheap gumshoe!”

“Get outta my way!”

“Kiff!” Donahue got between him and the door, bulking.

“A jane I know is in there. That door's locked. By you can't enter this house without a warrant!”

“Warrant! Holy Mary, I never in my life bothered with a warrant! Get out—”

“Kiff, you dumb animal!”

Donahue grabbed him, desperate now. He knew that if Kiff entered that door it would be murder. They'd murder Kiff. They wouldn't be caught red-handed with all that dough on them. And for the first time he found himself reacting to a moral obligation. Not one that included Kiff. To hell with Kiff! Kiff used to work stoolies on the street girls when he was on the vice squad. It was Mike Mueck. The East Side boy who grew up to be a swell lawyer. And himself too. Oh, Donahue was thinking of himself—

Kiff cursed and whirled. A blackjack crashed down on the crown of Donahue's hat. Donahue reeled away, fell

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against the wall of the building, fell down to the pavement.

Kiff broke through the door. Donahue, getting to his knees, saw Kiff disappear.

Three shots boomed out of the hallway.

A figure staggered out, slammed headlong to the pavement, lay motionless.

Donahue, half-risen, flung himself backward, fell into the recession between two store-windows. He heard two pairs of feet running—running away down the street. He got up, took his hat off, punched out the dents, replaced it on his head.

Windows grated open. Voices called. Heavy shoes came pounding from the distance.

Donahue stood on his feet, hefting his gun. He saw the two men tearing down the street, the tall one, Eddie, far in the lead. Eddie had the money on him. Donahue clamped his teeth, raised his gun, his arm out straight. Flame tore from the black muzzle. A woman screamed and a window slammed shut. Flame burst again. The little man reared, keeled over, struck a pole and spun down to the sidewalk.

Donahue broke into a run. Eddie had disappeared. Donahue reached the little man where he lay beside, the pole. He rolled him over, ransacked his pockets. No money. But a small black wallet, worn and bent out of shape. Donahue thrust this in his own pocket.

He stood up, looked back. A couple of cops were over Kiff's body. Donahue walked towards them swiftly, his face drawn, his lips dry. Damn Kiff for a snooper, a busybody! Everything would have gone off nicely but for Kiff. And Kiff had cooked his own goose. And Donahue had had to shoot that little guy. ...

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### IV

THE TWO COPS squared off, their guns drawn.

"Hello, boys," Donahue said.—;

"Stick your hands up! Who are you?"

Donahue didn't put his hands up. "I'm Donahue, an Interstate operative."

"What the hell are you doin' around here?"

Donahue jerked his head. "I just plugged a guy."

"Grab him, Joe!"

"Wait a minute!" Donahue said. "Not Kiff. A guy up the street."

"What guy?"

"The guy bumped off Kiff."

"Go ahead, Joe—go look at that guy he plugged."

Donahue pointed. "By that third light."

Joe started off.

The other cop put away his gun. "He's dead—Kiff's dead.

How'd it happen?"—j

"I don't know. I came around the corner here as the shots went off. I saw Kiff falling. There were two guys running away. I yelled at them. They didn't stop. Then I fired and got one of them. The other guy got away."

The precinct station was in an uproar. Donahue was in a room with Detective—Sergeant Brannigan.

"You saw them babies, Donahue—you saw them—"

"Get me right, Sarge," broke in Donahue. "I saw them running away. Running away. I just yelled to them to stop. They didn't. So I let 'em have it."

"Why the hell didn't you get the other guy?"

"I had a job getting one. It was pretty dark. The other guy just got away. I should go running around the streets and have a cop take a shot at me!"

"He went in that house, Donahue. There's bullet marks in the walls. The damned house was supposed to be empty. No rooms was rented to anybody. The house was empty. But those two babies must ha' been in there, 'cause Kiff went in. Kiff got the works in the hall there and must ha' fell out the door. If I only had an idea why Kiff went in that house. But I ain't."

"Maybe he knew the place was empty and saw a light in there—"

"I'll get that other guy, Donahue. He'll burn for this, and before he burns he'll get the beatin' of his life. We'll beat him till his eyes pop. I got a general alarm out. We're pick—in' up any guy don't look right. We'll get that baby!"

When Mueck opened the door he was in bathrobe and dressing—gown. "Well, Donny—" Donahue stepped into the apartment, closed the door, said: "Well, Mike, I got the pearls."

"Great!"

"Oh, you think so?" Donahue scaled his hat on to the divan, threw open his ulster, began pacing up and down.

"Not by a long shot, Mike. There's trouble and plenty of it. Kiff, a precinct dick, got the works."

"You didn't!"

"Hell, no, I didn't. But one of the guys I called on did. And I had to plug one of the guys—to save my face. And incidentally, your face."

"Donny!"

"Keep cool, Mike. I knew damned well this job should have been thrown to the cops. But it's done now, and I suppose it's up to me to find a way out."

"Are—are you suspected?"

Donahue stopped. "No. Not yet, anyhow. They think I'm a great guy because I plugged one of the hoods that got Kiff. Kiff—that snooping old fool! But"—he wagged a forefinger—"the cops are throwing out the old dragnet, and if they pick up the other guy, find the jack on him— Listen, Mike, this is not going to be any bed

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of roses.”

“But how did it all happen? Sit down, Donny. Have a drink.”

Donahue sat down. Mueck poured out some Scotch. Donahue downed it straight. He told Mueck what had happened. Mueck walked up and down, eyes glued on the carpet, teeth nibbling at lips.

Donahue cracked fist into palm. “I tried to keep Kiff out of there! I knew damned well that if he went in those two hoods would let him have it. But the jackass took a swipe at me with his blackjack and I took a header. Before I could organize myself it was over.”

Mueck sat down, spoke quietly: “It looks bad, Donny.”

“Don't worry, Mike. I'll keep you out of it.”

“Nonsense! Do you think I'd let you take the rap alone?”

“Be your age, Mike. What's the use of everybody taking the rap? And besides, shut up about a rap. So far I'm in the clear. Just act as if nothing happened. And tell that client of ours to keep her face shut.”

“I shouldn't have got you into this, Donny. But I didn't dare take it myself. The legal profession is the butt of a lot of unfair criticism these days. And a lawyer found acting as intermediary for thieves is immediately suspected of cashing in on it. But, damn it, Mrs. Jennifer wanted those pearls! She would have paid more than twenty thousand for them! Oh, she's a hard client, Donny. Eccentric as blazes. They were her mother's pearls.”

“Yeah?” Donahue was dangling the long string. “They're sweet—they're certainly sweet. But they're causing a lot of tears, Mike.”

Mueck took them and ran them through his fingers. “What do you intend doing, Donny?”

“The guy who got away looked like a real gun, Mike. He looked hopped up too. A tough hombre. We've got one chance of cleaning out of this.”

“What's that?”

“I've got to get to that guy before the cops do.”

He had lied—naturally enough—to Kiff. Kiff had tried to butt into his business. Kiff had had a hunch that Donahue had been hanging around that corner for other reasons than amorous ones. So Donahue had lied. The lie was based on many ramifications. He had had to protect himself, the crooks he later met; and he had not wanted to start something that in the long run might well have reached and drawn in Mueck.

Mueck stood up, gestured with both hands. “Hell, Donny, I don't see why you should run the chance of getting killed.”

“I'd rather do that than run my chances with the cops—at this stage. I've got to, Mike. This guy is a killer and I have no qualms about going after him. You and I are fairly honest men. But that wouldn't prevent the law from having you disbarred and very likely pitching me in jail. If they get that guy—find the dough—he'll talk. And will it be rough on me? Don't ask!”

“Remember, Donny, I'm with you—I'm not trying to slide out.”

Donahue laughed. “I never had any doubts about that, Mike.” He pinched Mueck's arm. “And remember, let me handle it, old kid. It's the kind of work I'm cut out to handle.”

“I feel sort of——”

“I know how you feel. But you couldn't help me by baring your breast to the H.Q. crowd. I'll see the old dame in the morning. She's got to bury this necklace among her other souvenirs.”



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### V

HINKLE LOOKED WORRIED when Donahue breezed in at ten next morning. He looked up from the newspaper.

“I see you're a hero, Donny.”

“Well, I gave the dame her necklace and she almost wept on my shoulder. I told her a few things though. I talked turkey. She swears she'll never mention the necklace. She never wore it anyhow. It's an heirloom.”

“Did you stop in at H.Q.?”

“Yes. I got there in time to witness the line-up. They had dozens of guys. But not the guy I want.”

Hinkle wagged his head. “What a mess!”

“I took a walk through the Rogues' Gallery. I spotted the guy. Man, he's a bad hood! So I helped myself to the dope they've got on him. He's been arrested ten times—for almost everything on the calendar: dope, felonious assault, concealed weapons, petty larceny. But he beat them all. Eddie Bishoff's his name.”

“Did they identify the other guy?”

Donahue sat down, said: “No.” He drew out a small black wallet, tapped it on an open palm, smiled. “I took this off that guy, Asa.”

“What the devil did you want to do that for?”

Donahue made no reply. He whistled to himself, emptied the wallet on the desk. “The cops,” he said, “have got more than a hundred guys combing the city—not counting the stoolies these hundred guys will swing into action. I'm one guy against that mob—one guy, Asa——”

“I was leery of this job——”

“Don't crab!” Donahue smacked his palm down on the photograph of a woman. “I've got this. Picture of a dizzy broad. 'Love to Louie from his Nora.' And here——down in the corner——'*Barcelona Club*, Jan. 4th.' A cabaret girl. 'His Nora.' Okey”——Donahue waved the picture——“I'll find that dame. Louie was the little guy. He put one bullet in Kiff. Eddie Bishoff put two.”

“Are they making any progress at H.Q.?”

“No. They dragged in a lot of punks and busted a lot of hose on some guys. They're mad for a pinch, what with the vice squad getting razzed these days. Here, this”——Donahue flattened a sheet of paper on the desk——“is a list of amounts of money, with dates alongside each amount. Small amounts. It's on the back of a piece of Hotel Grebb stationery. That's a one-fifty a night flop-house on Seventh Avenue. The paper looks old. But the picture doesn't.”

“Who's in charge of the case?”

“That bruiser Tom Brannigan. All steamed up. I was just talking to him at H.Q. He said if I ran into the guy got away I should tip him off and he'd see I got a case of Scotch. Big-hearted Mick, that Brannigan. I told him I'd snoop around. He said it was okey by him. I said: 'Tom, suppose I smack into this bird and have to shoot it out with him?' Tom looked down-hearted. He said: 'Hell, Donahue. Save him for the boys. We want to take it out of his hide and then pitch him to the D. A.'”

“Do you want a man to work with you?”

“No. It's solo for me, Asa. And don't say anything to any of the boys. And don't mention Bishoff's name. Well”——he grabbed up his hat——“I'll be seeing you, sweetheart.”

The *Barcelona Club* was closed at noon. It huddled between two drab brick houses in West Tenth Street. Its black door was flush with the street. Donahue knocked. A man opened the door and put out a wedge-shaped face.

“Barney here yet?”

“Who is it?”

“Donahue. Barney knows me. Ask him.” The door closed. Donahue waited. A minute later the door opened and Barney De Vere looked out——grinned, opened the door wide. “Bar's not open, Donny——”

“It's not that, Barney. Can we have a little talk? I'm hard up for a little information.”

They went into the lobby, across the dim dance-floor, down a short corridor and into a stuffy office. Barney nodded to a chair and Donahue sat down.

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"It's about a jane, Barney."

"Oh—oh."

"Can't remember her last name but I think she used to work in your little review. Maybe she does yet. Nora something—Nora—Nora—Well, a little brunette."

"Oh, you mean Nora."

"Yeah, Nora."

"Yeah—Nora Slaven. What did she do?"

"Nothing," Donahue said. "Not a thing. I just want to have a talk with her—a real heart-to-heart talk, Barney." Barney sighed, shook his head. "She used to work here, Donny. Up until a month ago. She left, and she didn't say why."

"Do you know where she went?"

"No, I don't, Donny. I often thought she might have run off with a little guy used to hang around here a lot. Louie Brown—or something, I dunno. Say, I see by the paper you did the cops a good deed."

"Yeah. Ran into a gun-fight and helped old John Law. Well, thanks, Barney."

"Drop in some time."

"Sure."

"Sorry I can't help you out."

"Don't know where she lived, eh?"

"Well, she lived upstairs till she left."

Barney didn't know that Louie Brown was the man Donahue had shot last night. Neither did the cops. The corpse was still that of "an unidentified man." Donahue walked over to Sheridan Square and caught a north-bound subway train. He got off at Penn Station and walked a few blocks north on Seventh Avenue. He took a look at the drab facade of the Grebb Hotel. He dropped into a corner cigar store nearby and crowded into a telephone booth, got a number out of the directory. He put a nickel in the slot.

Yes, the girl at the Grebb said, Mr. Louis Brown lived there. Donahue hung up, stood for a while near the cigar stand. He didn't want anyone at the Grebb to know that he was looking for Louie Brown. He left the cigar store and went down to the Penn Station. He sent a wire to Louie Brown at the Grebb. "*Call me when you get this. Jim.*" Then he left the station and retraced his steps north on Seventh Avenue, entered the Grebb.

The lobby was as drab as the facade. A dozen men sat around in wooden rockers. Donahue joined them and waited, watching the door. Half an hour later a Western Union messenger came swinging in. Donahue rose casually and sauntered to the desk, flipped tourist and excursion leaflets negligently.

"Wire for Mr. Brown."

The clerk turned from a ledger, signed the slip. He called over to the switchboard: "Brown in 408 in?" The operator buzzed.

Donahue left the desk, went back into the washroom, killed ten minutes there and then came out. He took an elevator to the fourth floor.

A master key paved the way for him. He slipped into a narrow room that had a narrow bed, a dresser, a cheap green armchair. The closet door was open. Inside were a couple of hats, a suit, a pair of shoes, a yellow suitcase on the floor. He opened the suitcase. It was empty. He searched the pockets of the suit. They were empty.

Half a dozen shirts were in one of the dresser drawers. Socks, handkerchiefs, in another, and underclothes. Odds and ends in another: a pocketknife, some pennies, a tarnished cigarette case, some poker chips, cards. Donahue closed all the drawers, disgruntled. Then his roving glance landed on the telephone. Hanging from the mouthpiece was an oblong sheet of cardboard with an advertisement at the top and ruled horizontal lines beneath it. There was some scribbling on it. Donahue removed the cardboard and squinted. Names. Telephone numbers. *Nora*. Donahue drew his lips tightly against his teeth. He sat down and copied the names and numbers. Six names. *Johnnie S. . . . Pete. Nora. Kitty. Ed. Luke*. He returned the cardboard to the telephone mouth-piece, hesitated, then removed it, tore it to bits.

He left the room, locked the door, went down in the elevator, out into the street. He made a flying trip to the Agency office, in Park Row.

"Call up your friend in the telephone company, Asa," he . said, "and get the street addresses of those telephone numbers."

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“Oh, you've been places, eh?” .

“Yeah. Louie Brown was the little guy's name. He had a room at the Grebb Hotel. I busted in.”

“How you get around!”

“Well, go ahead, Asa. Those two dames on there——Kitty and Nora——have the same number. Pals, I suppose.”

Asa made a telephone call, called off the telephone numbers, and hung up. Donahue gave him a resume of what he had done and the manner in which he had done it. The telephone rang. Asa answered it, pencil in hand. Beside each number on the slip of paper Donahue had given him, he wrote down an address. Finished, he said: “Thanks, Bill,” and hung up. He shoved the slip of paper across the desk.

“May God watch over you, Donny.” Donahue seemed not to have heard. He stared round-eyed at the addresses, his lips moving. “Ed,” he said, “may be Eddie Bishoff.”

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### VI

DONAHUE came out in Park Row and walked over to Broadway. He turned north and was nearing Chambers Street when a bull voice hailed him. Before he could locate the voice a P.D. flivver hurtled to the curb. Tom Brannigan was leaning out, waving a red, beefy hand, grinning like a fool.

“Come here, Donny.”

“Hello, Tom.”

“Yah, boy—yah, boy!” Brannigan spat with gusto. “What the hell do you think? Hey?”

“Got me, Tom.”

“We got that punk identified. Louie Brown's his name. That punk you give the works, Donny. Hot dog! Yah! Ain't that hot, kiddo—ain't it? Yah! Well, we got him identified all right. A pal of a pal of a pal of mine—'Sure, I seen that guy,' he sez. 'Louie Brown's his name.' All I gotta do now, kiddo, is get my stoolies workin' to find out who was trottin' around with Louie Brown. Watch the papers, Donny. You'll be seein' things.”

Donahue forced a grin, not heartfelt. “Swell, Tom.”

“Goin' up a ways?”

“Yeah.”

“Jump in.”

Donahue dropped to the seat in the rear beside Brannigan and the police flivver started off. Brannigan erupted, slapping his knees, chewing a cigarette to rags, the feel of the hunt burning in his eyes.

“Just depend on Tom Brannigan, Donny,” he said. “I'll get that bum got away. Me, personal. Before sundown I'll have the name o' the guy was trottin' with Louie Brown. I'll bust everything but his windpipe. Yah.” Donahue got off at Eighth Street and walked west with Brannigan's voice still re-echoing in his ears. He did not doubt that Brannigan, who had a vast array of stoolies, would discover the name of the late Louie Brown's partner before sundown. Armed with the name of Eddie Bishoff, Brannigan would find his police record, get his underworld spies working, and eventually get Bishoff.

Donahue hardened in his purpose. It showed on his face. He knew of a private cop on the West Coast who had been engaged to turn over an amount of money to a gang of crooks in return for bonds that had been stolen from a Seattle bank. A bank official had engaged him. There was a slip-up. The bonds were returned well enough, but then the cops started in; hauled in the private cop for abetting the criminals, handed him a jail sentence, thereby setting a precedent.

Donahue knew he was headed for a jam. And he knew that if he got in the jam Mike Mueck would be fool enough to try to get him out and in so doing would entangle him self. And Brannigan was on a tear.—Brannigan was ruthless, a hard cop, in his way a good one. But he would rough-house Donahue as quickly and as explosively as he had, on many an occasion, shaken his hand and clapped him on the back.

In Grove Street, near Sheridan Square, Donahue neared the address that corresponded with the telephone number Louie had written alongside the name of Ed. It was a speakeasy. Donahue grumbled his disappointment. But he entered, following a long corridor that terminated in a bar, with tables along the wall. He went to the corner where a telephone stood, looked at the number. It corresponded with the number on the slip of paper.

Donahue went to the bar, hooked his heel on the rail and ordered a highball. The barman whistled sleepily while he mixed the drink. Donahue took a few swallows, frowned— not because of the liquor but because of an indecisive train of thought. Finally he drained the glass, got change from a dollar, went out. He had decided not to bring up Ed's name to the barman, since he believed that nothing would have been gained by it. He didn't want to spring Bishoff's name until he could be certain that it would bring definite information.

He took a cab to Twenty-sixth Street. The address was that of a small apartment house. A row of mail slots was in the lobby, with names above. One was—*Miss Kitty Bra-don*. Donahue pushed into a narrow, bare foyer. There was no elevator. He started up a staircase. There were two apartments on each floor, the doors facing each other across a small landing. On the third landing Donahue stopped and looked at the door marked 4B. He looked at the name under the bell-button.

He listened at the door. His right hand closed around the gun in his coat pocket. He used his left thumb to press

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the button. He eyed the door steadily. Heard footsteps. A woman's voice. "Who is it?"

"Special delivery, ma'am."

The lock clicked. The door opened a matter of two inches.

A blonde head appeared. A hand thrust out. Donahue grabbed it. "Quiet, sister!"

He elbowed the door violently, shouldered in, kicked the door shut. His gun was in his hand, his voice low—"Not a chirp, sister."

"Ow—you're hurting!"

He flung down her arm, trained the gun on her, backed her down the short, narrow corridor, into a small living-room. He nodded to a divan.

"Sit down."

She fell to the divan, drawing up her legs, rubbing her hands back and forth across her chest, her eyes wide. Donahue stepped to the door, looked into a kitchenette, saw part of a bedroom. He looked quickly back to the girl, his eyes keen. "Where's Nora?"

"Nora—?"

"You heard me. Nora."

"She's—out."

Donahue remained standing. He pointed at the woman.

"You knew Louie Brown!"

She clasped her face between her hands.

"And"—Donahue was incisive, hard—"you know Eddie Bishoff!"

She shrieked: "Who—who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. Where's Bishoff?" She put her head back, gasping, saying nothing. Donahue hefted his gun.

"I haven't all day. Get your breath and tell me. I want to know where Bishoff is. I don't care about your girl friend—unless I have to find her to find Bishoff. But I want Bishoff. Louie Brown knew you and Nora Slaven."

"You're a cop!" she cried. "That's what you are—a cop!"

"Yeah, I'm a cop," Donahue drawled. She appeared to make an effort to pull herself together. She stood up, pressed her hands to her hips, moved to a half-open window and inhaled great draughts of air, kneading her hips. Then she pivoted and faced Donahue, her face very white, very grim.

"You've got to help her," she murmured.

"Help her!"

"Nora—you've got to help her—or help me—whatever Way you want to put it." Donahue wagged his gun. "Sister, don't try to kid me."

"For —sake! . . ." She clasped her hands together, moving them up and down monotonously, emotionally. "I 'She's a good girl—but bewitched. She's a good girl—but a fool, a little fool, an awful fool. Please—believe me!"

Donahue relaxed, a shadow falling over his face, sarcasm fading from his lips, his lips softening, his eyes keening but at the same time losing their contemptuous glitter.

Yet he spoke bluntly—"Shoot." Willing to listen, yet still watchful, wary—still mindful of the fact that he had been bitten many times, the scars still on his memory. "It's got to sound damned good, my lady."

The woman had not the aspect of a hot-house lily, but at the same time she had a vague prettiness. Emotion had tensed her; she stood image-like, only her lips moving.

"I don't know what he did. He came here last night—late—around midnight. He looked murderous. But he was cool, in that cool way he has. He wanted us to hide him here. I loathed him. But Nora—well, he was a friend of Louie's. She never believed they were bad men. She met them where she worked—in a night club. She came from Utica. He said he had tried to save Louie—he was wounded—in the arm.

"But I wouldn't let him stay. I didn't know what had happened, but I wouldn't let him stay. I own this flat. I got Nora to give up that night-club life, she was such a little fool. I tried to get her away from Louie. But he had that morbid fascination for her; she pitied him—he had hard-luck stories.

"So he was wounded. And we argued. He said he got wounded trying to save Louie. He must have known this would be a good place to hide. It's a respectable house. I was terrified. So then Nora said, like a baby: 'He's

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Louie's friend. I've got to—stand by him.' I wouldn't let him stay here. I was furious——then furious at Nora. She went with him. He said to me, while she was in the bathroom: 'You keep your mouth shut about this or I'll kill you——and her.' So she went away with him, to nurse him."

She moved to the divan, dropped to it, rubbing her palms slowly together, elbows on knees. She stared transfixed at the carpet.

"I followed them," she said; then looked up, startled, her eyes springing wide-open. "You've got to save her——save that little fool! She's innocent!"

"Go on," Donahue muttered.

"So——I followed them. Nora took a suitcase. She looked dazed, and nun-like. The awful little fool!" She sobbed, then bit the sobs back. "First she bound up his arm—— tightly. Then they went——and I followed. I followed them to the Hall Hotel, on Broadway, near Thirty-seventh Street. They registered as Mr. and Mrs. Norman. The poor little fool!"

Donahue groaned, raised his hands, looked at the ceiling.

"I swear," she said, "that Nora doesn't know what she's doing! Isn't there something——something you can do? I want to save her. I'll take her out of New York——take her back to Utica——anything. But, please, she's innocent!"

Donahue sat down. Sat down and shoved his gun into his pocket, lit a cigarette and eyed the woman for a long time through the smoke that dribbled upward. And she eyed him, eyes wide-open, frank, candid, deeply troubled. Donahue grunted. He slapped a palm to a knee, left it there, looking down at the fingers. He grunted again, making a face. Then his lips tightened. He looked up.

"You've got to get them out of that hotel," he said. "Get them——Why?"

"If I went there and crashed in their room there wouldn't be a chance of getting your friend in the clear. It would be slaughter and she'd bounce into trouble. We've got to get them out of that hotel——that's final."

"But then what?"

He jabbed a finger towards the floor. "Telephone her. Tell her you're sorry you acted the way you did. You've thought it over——and you're sorry. Tell them to come here. Impress on them that you think it would be safer here than in that hotel."

"But"——she spread her hands——"there would be slaughter here and she'd be drawn in anyhow. And so would I. It would be an awful mess."

"Listen," Donahue said, getting up. "I can go over to that hotel and crash it. Or you can do as I say. I want Bishoff. For the information you've given me, I'm willing to try my best to keep Nora out of it. And to do that, we've got to get both of them out of that hotel first."

"But don't you see——"

"Be quiet. I see. I know. You've got to depend on me——and the breaks. Telephone the hotel. Talk them into coming over to hide out here. Leave the rest to me."

She held her breath for a long minute. Then she said quietly: "All right." She rose and walked white-faced to the telephone.

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### VII

THEY SAT WAITING, LISTENING. Sometimes their eyes crossed, but for the most part they said nothing. The woman sat very straight on the divan, her hands folded primly in her lap, her face grave. A small clock ticked on a console. In another apartment a radio was playing. Donahue sat with his gun hanging between his knees, his coat open.

He said in a hoarse whisper: "Now remember——convince her. Don't get out of town too suddenly. Wait a while. And never say anything about my being here. If I get him out ——and I hope to——I do!——never say anything about it.

This guy Bishoff has a record against him a mile long."

She whispered, "I'll do my best."

They went on sitting, listening, looking at the clock. The woman bit her lip, knotted her hands, moved her lips without audible sound. She got up and paced back and forth, feeling her throat, touching her lips with her tongue.

"Steady," Donahue murmured.

She sat down again, fanning herself with a newspaper, rolling her eyes.

Donahue muttered: "You've got to look natural when you meet them. The way you are now——"

"I know——I know," she said, trembling. "Oh . . . ——!"

"Sh!" He looked around. "Got any liquor?"

"I never use it."

"Hell!"

She got up and went into the bathroom, washed her face with cold water. It seemed to steady her. She came back into the living-room, holding her chin up. Sat down again.

The door-bell rang.

Donahue stood up, putting a finger to his lips. The woman rose. Oddly enough, she looked calm——suddenly calm. She even smiled grimly. She went swiftly out into the little corridor.

Donahue stepped to one side of the console, flattening against the wall. He held his gun waist-high. The radio downstairs had stopped. He could hear every sound. He heard the latch click as the woman opened the door.

"Hello, Nora, dear——Eddie."

"Oh, Kitty——you're so sweet!"

The door closed. "Hello, Kitty," a man's voice said. "I'm glad you changed your mind. I'll lay up here for a couple of days, then breeze."

The footsteps came scuffling down the corridor. Donahue dropped to one knee behind the console. Nora came into the room first. Hardly twenty, a slip of a starry-eyed kid. Then Bishoff came in, his left hand in his pocket, resting there.

Donahue stood up, stepped out. "All right, Eddie."

Bishoff stiffened. His right hand swept towards his left armpit.

"Cut it, kid!" Donahue muttered. "Keep that hand away!"

Bishoff's lip curled; he snarled at Kitty: "You dirty little two-timer!"

Starry-eyed was Nora——still unable to grasp the situation.

"Why——why, what's the matter?" she asked.

"You see what's the matter!" snapped Bishoff. "Your friend laid a trap for me!"

"Kitty——"

"Sit down, Nora," Kitty said, breathless. "I had to get you out of this. This man's a murderer."

Nora cried: "Kitty, how could you? He's not a murderer! He tried to save Louie. He told me how the cops had been persecuting them. He told me how cops beat poor men in station-houses with everything they can lay hands on."

"He told you a pack of lies," cut in Donahue. "This man has a fat police record. He's an old offender. And he's a killer. He came here after he killed a cop for protection, knowing what a little fool you are. This flat offered the best kind of protection. He was a louse to try to drag you into it."

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“Yeah, was I a louse!” snarled Bishoff.

“I’m not wasting words on you,” Donahue said. “You’re going out of here with me. You’re cheap, Bishoff—you’re so damned cheap that you hadn’t a crowd to hide out in. You had to drag in a fool jane. Why, damn you, you didn’t even have a fence. I said it—you’re a louse.”

“Oh, Eddie, I’m sorry—I’m sorry,” cried Nora Bishoff whirled on her, started to say something, changed his mind. She was staring at Kitty.

“Oh, Kitty, how could you do a thing like this!”

“Nora, it’s for your own good. Can’t you see? Do you want to go to jail? Do you?”

“We’re going,” Donahue broke in, moving towards Bishoff.

Nora sprang at him, blind to the gun.

“Run, Eddie!”

Donahue fell back. He saw Bishoff bolt for the door. He did not strike Nora. He tussled half-heartedly with her. Kitty sprang and gripped Nora’s arms, pleaded with her. The hall-door banged.

Donahue tore free. “That’s all right,” he said. “I’ll get him, Kitty. But keep your friend here. Knock her senseless if you have to. She’s probably the dumbest animal I’ve ever seen. But keep her here. She’s in your hands. And your hard luck. Get her out of town. She hasn’t been told the facts of life.”

“Thanks—thanks!”

“So long, sister.”

Donahue reached the foyer as the front door was closing. He saw Bishoff heading west at a brisk walk. As he stepped from the lobby, Bishoff looked back and saw him. Donahue started after him, stretching long legs in a fast walk.

At Eighth Avenue Bishoff dived into a taxicab. Donahue broke into a run and hailed another cab at the corner.

“Follow that yellow,” he said.

The yellow cab swung west into Twenty-fifth Street, and Donahue’s taxi followed. The two cabs snaked among slow trucks. The yellow crossed Ninth Avenue, swung south on Tenth. Bishoff leaped from it at the corner of Twenty-second Street and headed west on foot. Donahue left his cab there and followed.

At Eleventh Avenue Bishoff ran into the middle of the street and leaped aboard a cruising taxi. Donahue broke into a run. The cab started south. There was not another nearby, but one was coming north. Donahue ran towards it, out in the street. The cab stopped.

“Swing around and tail that checker,” Donahue said.

He sat on the edge of the rear seat. His cab gathered speed. The checker ahead was speeding on its way south; it struck West Street and went flying past the pier sheds. It looped around slow-moving trucks. It swayed dangerously. Then suddenly it stopped. Bishoff leaped out and ran pell-mell across the wide thoroughfare, dodging northbound traffic.

Donahue tossed a dollar to the chauffeur and tailed Bishoff into Barrow Street. Bishoff started running and Donahue ran after him. Bishoff darted across Washington Street, across Greenwich, turned north into Hudson. He had long legs. He was fast.

He turned east on Christopher Street and then swung right into Bedford. People stopped and stared after him, only to be surprised again by the appearance of Donahue, his coat flapping about his legs. Others darted into convenient doorways, sensing trouble, the possibility of gunfire.

At the corner of Grove a policeman appeared, idly swinging a nightstick. He took one look at Bishoff, saw the light in his eyes. He shouted: “Hey, you, wait—” Bishoff’s gun came out of his pocket for the first time during the chase. It blazed. The cop got it in the throat and crumpled, gurgling.

A pedestrian screamed and flung herself to the sidewalk, hugging a house front.

Donahue leaped over the fallen policeman. He saw Bishoff crash into a store on Grove Street. Donahue crashed in after him. There was a door open in the rear. He started for it. He heard a snarl and threw himself down as a gun boomed. A bullet smashed into the wall back of him. He saw Bishoff reeling towards the front door again. He fired. The bullet shattered a window.

Bishoff plunged back into Grove Street, sideswiped a woman, kicked over a child. The woman started to rise. She saw Donahue heaving out of the door and fell down again. The child screamed. People were on the corner—a dozen or more. But they did nothing. They stood petrified.



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Blindly the chase led to Sheridan Square, across the Square while a policeman directed heavy—traffic, up to Waverley Place, then east. At Sixth Avenue Bishoff turned and fired a shot. It went through Donahue's hat without budging the hat. Donahue fired and his bullet rang against an L post, and Bishoff turned up Sixth Avenue. He turned and saw Donahue taking aim again. He flung himself against a door. The door gave and he plunged into a hallway. Donahue reached the door and saw him at the top of a staircase. He dived in headlong as Bishoff fired. He felt a jolt in his right arm and dropped his gun. He fell to the floor as another shot boomed and gouged the floor behind him. He grabbed up the gun in his left hand and started up the staircase.

Bishoff broke through a door on the second floor. A woman cried out and dropped a skillet to the stove. He struck her with the gun and she fell to the floor. His teeth were bared, his eyes blazed and sounds grated in his throat. The woman kept moaning and he cursed her. Food from the overturned skillet hissed and sputtered on the hot stove.

Donahue crept to the end of the hall, climbed out to a fire—escape, swung to the kitchen window. Bishoff saw his shadow, swivelled. Donahue fired across the woman on the floor. Bishoff's bullet struck the upraised window; glass rained down on Donahue as he fired again. Bishoff fell; back against the wall, grimacing, trying to raise his gun.:

Donahue jumped through the window, stepped over the woman. Bishoff cursed him, still tried to raise the gun. He groaned. The gun went off and a bullet banged into the floor. He couldn't raise the gun. He fell down, belching. The woman was creeping towards the door. Donahue laid his gun down, tore open Bishoff's coat, plunged his hand into Bishoff's pocket. He drew out a thick sheaf of bills held together by an elastic band. He transferred them to his own pocket.

As he stood up he heard heavy shoes rapping up the stairs, hard voices exclaiming. Tom Brannigan loomed in the doorway, his gun leveled.

“Hands up!”

“Your eyesight bad, Tom?”

“Jeeze, it's Donahue! What you been——Jeeze you got him!” Brannigan tramped across the room. “I told you, Donny, to save him for us! Watcha want to go and—— Say, I would ha' had that baby. I got tipped off an hour ago it was him was runnin' with Louie Brown. Louie, we find, is wanted in Denver. He cleared outta there six months ago after knifin' a woman!”

Half a dozen cops crowded in.

Brannigan bent over Bishoff. “Well, you wiper! Well—— Hey, he's dead! Well, c'n you tie that!” He turned to Donahue. “How come you 'meet up with him?”

“Well, Tom, I was strolling up Broadway in the Twenties, when I saw him. He saw me at the same time. I said to myself: 'I'll tail him and hole him up somewhere and then call Tom Brannigan.' I tried to, Tom. But he got loose with his gun. He got me in the arm. I——I've got to get to a hospital, Tom. Look me up there.” He put his gun away. “You're not sore, are you, Tom?”

“Well”——Brannigan scowled——“what's the use o' gettin' sore. I'll okey this, Donny.” He jerked his head. “Beat it to the hospital before you get infection. I'll see you there later.”

Donahue went downstairs, pushed through the curious mob, found a taxicab. He climbed in, fell back, called out the Agency's address. He got white on the way downtown. Getting out of the cab in Park Row, he staggered.

He walked stiff-legged into Hinkle's office. Hinkle shoved his chair back.

“My——! Donny, what's the matter!”

Donahue flopped to a chair, drew out the sheaf of bills.

“Count them, Asa.”

“But you——you——you're sick.”

Donahue licked his lip. “Upset stomach, I guess. Count them, Asa.”

Hinkle pulled off the rubber bands, began counting. As he counted, his eyes grew wider. Donahue sighed in the chair, dropping his chin to his chest.

Asa said: “Exactly twenty thousand!”

“Good. He must have been afraid to spend any of it so soon. See that gets back to Mrs. Jennifer, Asa. Do it now. And tell her to forget about it. I'm pretty sure I've burned all my bridges behind me. Tell Mike Mueck to come over to the hospital to see me sometime, if he's not busy.”

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He stood up. His right hand was red. The blood had come down his sleeve. He took a handkerchief and wrapped it around his hand.

Hinkle said, jumping up: "Why didn't you tell me you were wounded, you idiot?"

Donahue went towards the door. "It's not much, Asa. The punk just gave me a little something to remember him by."

Asa heaved towards the clothes-tree. "I'll go with you."

"You'll take that money right up to Mrs. Jennifer, that's what you'll do!" He went out alone.

## Death's Not Enough

WHEN DONAHUE heard the dull thump against the door he twisted around in bed and listened, pipe in one hand, magazine in the other.

The cylindrical brass reading lamp, clipped to the head of the bed, sprayed light on his neck, past his ears, picked out rumpled twists of black hair and left his face mostly in shadow.

Half a minute passed without a recurrence of sound. The tenth story room was intimately quiet.

Donahue looked at the clock on the little bed-table. It was twelve-thirty. He shrugged, pyramided the coverlet with his knees, took a drag at his briar and resumed reading.

Then another sound reached his ears: a scraping, like cat's claws on wood. Then a definite thump. Donahue sat up slowly, laid aside the magazine, reached over and placed his pipe on the bed-table. He shoved big, strong feet out of bed and stood up in gray silk pajamas. He scowled at the door, a little annoyed, a little curious.

He took a flat black automatic pistol from the bed-table drawer and released the safety. He held the gun negligently, like one accustomed to guns, and moved slowly on bare feet towards the door. Silently he threw the catch. His left hand closed over the knob, he turned it as far as it would go, then yanked the door inward and stepped back.

A man fell flat on his face across the threshold. He had been kneeling by the door. He went down so fast that Donahue did not see his face. Donahue stood motionless, covering the man.

"Well, get up," he said.

The man did not move. A muffled phlegmatic groan reached Donahue's ears. He took a step across the man and looked up and down the hall; saw no one. He stepped back in, bent down, gripped the man's shoulder and turned him over on his back. He couldn't see the face clearly, so he switched on the ceiling light.

There was a thread of blood lying from one corner of the stranger's mouth down across his jaw. The lips were pursed tightly, the face muscles taut; in the glazed eyes was a fierce white look, blind and-unseeing but awesome in its fixed intensity on space.

Donahue closed the automatic's safety, knelt down, unbuttoned the blue topcoat, unbuttoned the vest. There was a wet splotch of crimson on a white shirt. Hoarse, spasmodic breathing pumped through the nostrils and the lips twitched but remained resolutely pursed.

Donahue said nothing. He somehow knew—because of the look in the eyes—that it would be futile to say anything. He stood up, ran his hand through his hair, took three long steps and picked up the telephone.

"A doctor—quick. A man's dying. . . . Now, now, sweetheart, never mind. Get a doctor up."

He hung up and slipped the receiver quietly into the hook. He went quickly into the bathroom, drew a glass of water and came back. He knelt down, looking at the eyes. He shrugged. He tried to get the man to drink. The man wouldn't. He wouldn't budge those lips.

Donahue set the glass down, remained kneeling on one knee, leaning with his elbow on the other. He reached down and patted the man's shoulder. But he didn't say anything. His face was somber, his brown eyes troubled.

The elevator door banged open and quick footsteps came down the hall. Donahue looked up and saw Mason, the chief night clerk—Mason, white-faced and breathless, eyes popping.

"The operator said—"

"Did she get a doctor?"

"He'll be up—he'll be right up. I called Monahan too. Good grief! What happened—what happened?"

"Ask me another," Donahue muttered, still looking at the tortured face on the floor. "Did you do anything? Did you—is he? . . ."

"Keep your pants on, Mason. What can I do? He's been shot in the belly. He was lying against my door. I guess he couldn't make his own. Know him?"

"He's—why, he's Mr. Larrimore! My—! he's Mr. Larrimore!"

"Who's Larrimore?"

"You know—you know. That—that column in the *Press-Examiner: The Awful Truth.*"

"Oh," said Donahue dully; but his brown eyes brightened. He said, "Get that doctor, Mason. He doesn't have to

## Six Deadly Dames

comb his hair. Tell him he doesn't have to comb his hair.”

“Yes—yes.”

Mason ran down the hall.

Donahue leaned close to the tortured face, tried to lock his glance with the roan's.

“Larrimore. Larrimore, who got you? Why? I'm Donahue, Larrimore—Donahue of the Interstate Detective Agency. If you can talk, Larrimore, spill it. Listen, Larrimore—Donahue, you must have heard of Donahue. Who shot you, Larrimore?”

He gave it up. He heard the elevator door open. Mason and the house doctor appeared, followed by Monahan, the house officer.

“Get him inside,” Monahan said. “We don't want to wake the hotel up. ... Hello, Donahue.”

They dragged Larrimore in and Mason came last, closing the door. The doctor changed spectacles and knelt down. He felt the pulse, shook his head; unbuttoned the shirt, pulled up the undershirt. He looked quickly at the man's face. He remained thus—looking at the face. Then he looked at his watch.

“Twelve–thirty–seven,” he said; rose, adding: “He's dead—quite dead.”

“Good grief!” choked Mason. “And we've never had a scandal—”

Donahue rasped, “That's all you're thinking about!”

The three men looked at him. He shrugged and went across and picked up his pipe, tamped it down. Monahan, a short, round-bodied man with a bald head, went to the telephone.

“Get Police Headquarters, Miss McGillicuddy. Detective–Sergeant Kelly McPard. Tell him to come right over. Mention my name. . . . Yes—yes, he died. And don't forget to mention my name.”

He hung up and looked importantly at Donahue. “You don't happen to know anything about this, do you?”

“Not a thing.”

Monahan picked up Donahue's gun, smelled the muzzle, drew out the clip. The gun was fully loaded—six in the magazine, one in the chamber. Monahan shoved back the magazine and laid the gun down.

Donahue, sitting on the bed, said: “You opened the safety, Monahan. When you monkey around with my gun leave it the way you found it.”

Kelly McPard was a big fat man with a neat, sandy mustache and rosy cheeks. His eyes were bright blue, whimsical, and he smiled easily, though a man with any sense at all could see the wiliness behind his good humor. He dressed in the height of fashion, and he drifted in through the door smoking a cork-tipped cigarette and looking like a million dollars. “Hello, Monahan. Why, hello there, Donahue. Hello, Dr. Stress. . . . Well, well, this is not so nice. Did you shoot him, Donahue?”

“Yeah. Twice in the belly.”

McPard chuckled and laid down his hat. His hair fell back in silken, shiny waves, without a part. “Who is he?”

“He's—Mr. Larrimore,” Mason said. “He lives down the hall in 1010. You know him—I mean, that column in the *Press-Examiner*.”

“A. B. Larrimore,” nodded McPard. “H'm.”

“Shot twice in the stomach,” Dr. Stress said. “He died a moment after I arrived here. There was nothing I could do.”

Mason said: “The elevator boy said he thought Mr. Larrimore was—well, you know, a little drunk—the way he walked, I mean. He sort of staggered into the elevator, with his coat collar up. He didn't say anything. The elevator boy knew the floor.”

“He never made his room,” Donahue said. “He fell against my door, sank there. I heard the thump. I was reading in bed.”

Mason yammered: “He wasn't shot in the hotel. I saw him come in the front, kind of staggering, his chin in his collar. He was like that a lot. But if he was shot like that, why did he come here to die?”

“He was out on his feet,” Donahue said. “A man gets like that and he steers for home. Or maybe he didn't think he was hurt so bad. Some guys don't like to slobber all over in public.”

“Might call that dying manners,” McPard said. “You were the guy told Scotch jokes at an Irish wake one night, weren't you?” Donahue said.

McPard had a velvet chuckle. He pulled up his trouser-legs by the knees before kneeling down. He wore sheer silk socks, starched cuffs with gold links. He pawed Larrimore's pockets casually, whistling absent-mindedly in a

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whisper. "H'm——right in the guts——side by side. . . . See it, Donny? Tsk, tsk! . . . No powder burns on the coat. No handshake kill. I think I'll have a look at the bullets anyhow. So you might call the morgue, Monahan? Thanks. . . . H'm, thirty-three dollars, sixty cents. And——isn't this a good-looking cigarette case?" He wrapped it carefully in a silk handkerchief.

"You never know," he sighed.

There was a furious pounding on the door. Monahan swore, stuck out his jaw and yanked it open. Libbey, of the *City Press*, reeled in, turned around once and flopped down in a chair.

"My ——! he's shot too!" Mason cried.

"Plastered," Libbey said. "Bacardi cocktails again. Hello, Donny, you big tramp. Hello, Sarge. . . . So Larrimore got it. Where? When? Come on, Sarge, whom do you suspect? There has got to be a suspect. Come on. I got the tip from H. Q. and I gave three other news-hawks a phony address, I think it was a lying-in hospital or a hotel for Lithuanian immigrant girls. Hello, Monahan, how's the keyhole business these nights?"

"Should I put this bum out?" Monahan said.

"You and what other two Swedes?" Libbey laughed.

"Leave him be," McPard said, still pawing Larrimore's pockets. "Only shut up, Libbey."

Donahue brought Libbey a drink and that shut him up.

McPard said: "Well, he has nothing on him worthwhile. If he walked here, he couldn't have been shot far away. Else he came in a cab. I'll find if he came in a cab. Was he drinking, Doc?"

"There was a faint smell of liquor. Not very distinct, however."

"I thought he'd get it some day," Libbey said. "That column of his was rich. He should have named it 'Private Lives——and How.' You know, my dear friends——as among gentlemen——this will create a furor. Inside of twenty-four hours the *Press-Examiner* will offer a reward. And other sheets, conscience-stricken because they have underpaid us newspapermen for so long——"

Donahue growled: "Pipe down, you fat-head."

"——other newspapers will supplement the reward and, attend——you, you and you, three enterprising master minds: here you are, the three of you, in the presence of one foully murdered——"

"Jeeze, Sarge," Monahan grumbled, "can't I throw this Stink out?"

"——Kelly McPard, Donny, and Monahan. Three of you, by a planetary coincidence, will each go his secret way with one eye on justice and one eye on the shekels. "Monahan looked guilty. McPard put a cork-tipped cigarette between his lips. His face beamed, but back of the laugh in his eyes burned a wily, speculative spark.

"But, Libbey," he said expansively, "we're all friends."

"Of course," said Donahue. He bent down, picked up a cardboard packet of matches, struck one and held it to McPard's cigarette. They smiled into each other's eyes. "Aren't we all?" McPard said.

"Sure," Donahue said. "We're all big-hearted guys, Kelly. "The phone rang. Monahan picked it up, listened, said above it: "The morgue wagon, Sarge."

When the body had been removed from the room, when McPard and Monahan had gone and Libbey had taken the stairway down to dodge three irate reporters, Donahue locked his door. Then he opened his hand and looked at the blue packet of paper matches. He opened the flap. Printed on the inside of the flap was: *The Venetian Cellar West Tenth Street*

Two matches were missing. One of them he had used to light McPard's cigarette. The other was missing when McPard, pawing Larrimore's coat pocket, had tossed the packet away as something inconsequential.

"Good old Kelly McPard," Donahue chortled.

He started dressing.

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### II

MASON was back at the desk in the lobby, his nerves jumpy.—But he was at least thankful that no one had been disturbed. He sincerely believed that at night he guided the destiny of the hotel. They had taken the body out in the freight elevator, then through the service entrance, and the reporters had gone along with McPard. He looked up and saw Monahan coming seriously across the dim, deserted lobby. Monahan had been fired from six private Detective agencies, but he still believed the agencies were wrong. The hotel had hired him because he was cheap. The hotel was small and mostly residential and a house officer was a superfluity anyhow. The owners kept him mainly to quiet drunken parties and to patrol the halls at two every morning to see if all the doors were locked.

Monahan went into a huddle with Miss McGillicuddy, whom he had awed from time to time with imaginary yarns of man-hunts. Monahan, you understand, figuring as the master mind exclusively.

“That 1005 now, Miss McGillicuddy,” he said impressively under his hand. “Keep an ear open on any telephoning; does.”

“You—you think he's—guilty?”

“Sh! No, not that. But he's a smart Aleck and if the hotel solves the death—the brutal death, Miss McGillicuddy—if one of its guests. . . . You get me? So keep an ear open. You know, there may even be a reward and”—— he leaned closer, winked——“I'm not a hog, young lady.”

“Geel!” She coughed and blew her nose. “Got an awful cough, Mr. Monahan.”

“A—uh—little pin money, you see, might fix it so you could get two weeks off and take a fling at Palm Beach.”

He walked away with a pious look on his face and his palms against his round thighs. He stopped as he saw a tall man in a brown ulster and a tan, rakish hat striding across the lobby for the doors. Donahue went out into a raw, full wind that blustered down the street. He turned south into University Place, west into Tenth Street. He crossed Fifth Avenue, reached Sixth, walked beneath the Elevated, cut across Greenwich and went down Tenth Street past Waverly Place. He crossed the street diagonally towards two blue globes that burned above a blue door in an areaway sunk four stone steps below the pavement. He elbowed the door open and entered a low-ceiled restaurant that had canals and gondolas painted on the walls. The blue lighting gave the faces of people a ghostly look.

Near the door was a cigarette showcase with a cash register alongside it and a man behind the cash register. The man had a mask-like face and a receding hair line. Donahue bought a package of cigarettes. Asked for a match. The man threw him a packet. The packet was blue.

Donahue went to a table, threw his hat and ulster on one chair, sat down in another. “Scotch and seltzer.”

He leaned back, put a cigarette between his lips, opened the blue packet. On the inside of the flap it said: *The Venetian Cellar—West Tenth Street.*

Nobody was eating now, but the menu was a large one specializing in Italian dishes. The waiter brought the drink.

“Where's the head waiter?” Donahue said.

The waiter looked at him blankly for half a moment, then turned and went off. He came back with a short fat man who had black marcelled hair, who carried a cigar horizontally at right angles to his uppermost vest button.

“Yes?”

“Will you sit down?”

“I'm sorry——”

“Only for a minute.”

The fat man sat down.

Donahue leaned on his elbows and looked straight into the dark pool-like eyes.

Donahue said: “Do you know Larrimore?”

“Who?”

“A. B. Larrimore.”

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The fat man looked down at his fat white hands, turned a diamond ring round and round; looked up and moved his shoulders in the semblance of a shrug.

“No,” he said. “No, I don’t,”

“He was here tonight,” Donahue said. “He’s a little shorter than I am, slim and well-built. Clean-shaven. Derby, blue overcoat, blue serge suit. He’s about forty, I’d say. Black hair, but”——he touched the side of his head—— “gray along here, quite gray. Distinguished looking man.”

“He was in here?”

“Yeah. In here.”

“Well, sure, he might have been. There was a lot of people here tonight. I wouldn’t know. I’m not out here much, only if somebody asks for me. Like you. Who’s Larrimore?”

“What I want to know is, what time did he leave here, and was he with anybody?”

The fat man sat back. “How do I know?”

“Was he with a man or a woman?”

The fat man made an impatient gesture. “I tell you, how do I know?”

“I tell you, he was here. Was he alone or——”

“Listen,” broke in the fat man irritably. “I don’t know who you’re talking about. All right, he was here. Maybe he was. If you say he was here, all right, then he was here. But I don’t remember. I can’t remember every guy comes in here. Or every woman——”

“Or every woman,” said Donahue.

“What?”

“Or every woman. You can’t remember the woman he was with.”

The fat man looked surprised. “What the hell are you talking about?” He scowled suddenly, heaved up. “Go on, you’re crazy.” He laughed and walked off.

Donahue got up and followed him. Tables were in the way. He had to weave among them. He followed the fat man to the other side of the restaurant and the latter was not aware of this until he was thrusting aside the rose-colored curtains leading to another room. He turned and his cigar, that had been jutting out straight from his mouth, drooped; his jaw drooped; his eyelids drooped. He looked suddenly sinister with his fat white face and his black pool-like eyes.

“This is a private room,” he said. “The door to the street is over that way.”

“Oh, that’s all right,” Donahue said cheerfully. “I just want to find out what time that man left here. Be a good egg. I’m a good egg and strictly on the up and up. I’m not trying to crash this scatter and if you knew me better you’d know what a swell guy I really am.”

“Are you trying to sell anything?”

“An idea. I’m trying to sell you the idea that it would be nice for you to play ring around the rosy with me.”

The fat man started a leer. “You mean——nice for *you*.”

“No. I mean”——Donahue flicked a thumb-nail against the man’s uppermost vest button——“for you.”

The fat man’s face drooped more; he had jowls now, sagging like wet dough in the ghostly bluish light. His lower lip sagged, revealing the lower part of his lower teeth.

He said slowly, distinctly: “I don’t know who you’re talking about. I don’t know you. Get out.”

“You feel that way about it, eh?”

The fat man said nothing. He put his cigar carefully between his lips, rolled it around with thumb and forefinger and regarded Donahue with his drooping, sinister eyes.

Donahue saw one of the waiters come up and stand beside him. He turned and saw another standing behind him. He saw a third leaning against the wall. He whistled a few bars to himself. He saw a cuspidor, squinted one eye towards it and snapped his butt into it.

“Okey,” he said. He went swiftly back to his table, gathered up his hat and coat, put the hat on but not the coat and went directly

out without looking at anyone. He walked long-legged to the next corner, swung left, stopped and put on his coat. He turned and peered around the corner. He saw a man standing on the sidewalk looking at the twin blue lights. He knew the shape, the build, the round shoulders. He saw Monahan go down the steps and through the blue door.

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He put his hands on his hips and bit off a sharp, caustic oath.

He heard heavy footsteps and pivoted. A patrolman came across the street, saying: "Why the hell all the hocus pocus?"

Donahue smiled, "Hello, Officer."

"Now let it go at that. What's the idea?"

"I thought someone was following me."

The patrolman snapped gum with his teeth and stood on wide-planted feet, his arms akimbo, nightstick dangling.

"On your way. Beat it."

Donahue said: "Sure," good-naturedly and strode off. He turned left into Christopher, went around the block and was again on Tenth Street. He slipped down into an area-way across from the twin blue lights. He looked at his strap-watch. It was ten past two. The street was deserted except for an occasional late-wandering drunk or a night-hawk taxicab.

Presently a man and a woman came out of the *Venetian Cellar*. They walked towards Hudson Street, stopping at intervals to embrace. Then a man came out putting on his coat. He staggered towards Sixth Avenue, singing. A man and a woman came out, the man supporting the woman; then two men; then two men and a quarrelsome girl.

A minute later the twin blue lights went out.

Donahue looked at his watch again. It was two-thirty. An Elevated train rumbled down Sixth Avenue. A taxi barged east with someone thumping a banjo. Silence fell again. And Donahue waited on. »

At two-forty-five Donahue heard footsteps clicking from the direction of Sixth Avenue: woman's high-heels by the sound of them. He saw a woman wrapped in a dark fur coat pass beneath a street light. She walked rapidly, each heel fall distinct. She turned down into the *Venetian Cellar* areaway and disappeared through the blue door.

Donahue craned his neck. He was about to climb to the pavement when he saw the woman reappear, rising quietly from the areaway, walking only on the soles of her feet.

She looked up and down the-street, walked a matter of ten yards and slipped behind a stone stoop that hid her from sight of anyone entering or leaving the *Venetian Cellar*.

Donahue retreated deeper into the well of shadows, his eyes keen and watchful. From time to time he saw the vague blur of the woman's face peering around the corner of the stoop. There was no street light near her. He could not get even a general idea of what she looked like.

His attention was diverted suddenly by the banging open of the blue door across the street. He heard low, angry voices. Then suddenly he saw Monahan being rough-housed up the steps by a couple of men. They shoved him and he fell down, and then the fat man appeared and stood at the brink of the sidewalk.

"Now beat it," he said. "I've stood plenty of your lousy lip. You've got this place of mine wrong."

"You'll see, you'll see," Monahan threatened, rising.

"All right, I'll see. You got no business to- come in my place and act wise. So scram."

Monahan brushed his coat with his hands and reset his hat. He shook his fist.

"Don't think a dago like you can get tough with me. I got friends at Police Headquarters. You can't get tough with me."

The fat man waved a hand. "Oh, go on and beat it, for cripes sake. You're just a loud noise. You asked for a slide to the pavement and you got it." He turned to the others. "Come on, boys."

They went down the stairs and through the blue door, banging it shut.

Monahan buttoned his coat, put a cigar in his mouth and stamped off.

Donahue thumbed his nose at Monahan's back and grinned with genuine satisfaction.



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### III

WHEN MONAHAN'S irate footfalls had died in the direction of Sixth Avenue, Donahue saw the woman slip from the shadows and enter the blue door. In a little while he saw four men come out and head east. They were the waiters. He waited ten minutes, then climbed to the sidewalk, darted silently across the street and descended to the *Venetian Cellar* areaway.

His right hand slipped beneath his coat to settle on the butt of his automatic. His left hand closed over the doorknob and eased it as far as it would go. He turned it in the other direction and after a firm but gentle pressure towards himself he knew that the door was locked.

His lips formed a silent oath. He turned and climbed to the pavement and returned to the areaway across the street! The fall air was cold and he turned up his collar, kept his hands thrust in his pockets.

At a little past three he heard the blue door open. After a moment the woman and the fat man climbed to the sidewalk. The man had hat and overcoat on and a red cigar-end marked his face. The woman took his arm and they started walking rapidly towards Sixth Avenue.

Donahue let them get a good lead, then followed, hugging the shadows and the house walls. He followed them through Waverly Place into Grove Street. They crossed Grove at the subway entrance, crossed Sheridan Square towards a row of three taxies parked in front of a lunch-wagon.

Donahue stopped at the north side of the Square. He looked up and down West Fourth Street. It was wide here—and deserted. He saw the fat man and the woman get into a taxi and drive off. He waited until the taxi was out of sight and then drifted across the Square and entered the all-night lunchroom.

Monahan was sitting at the far end of the counter, drinking milk, eating pie and reading a newspaper. He did not look up. Donahue gave himself a half-smile and sat down near the door.

“Cup of black coffee,” he said.

Monahan looked up. His eyes popped.

Donahue grinned. “Hello, Monahan.”

“Hello, Donahue.”

“Out late, aren't you?”

“Came out to get the air and a bite to eat.” He thought for a moment, wrinkling his forehead in perplexed indecision. Then he picked up the glass of milk, the pie and his paper, and came down next to Donahue. He leaned over, spoke out of the side of his mouth.

“What do you think of that kill, Donahue?”

“Huh? . . . Oh, that. Well, Monahan, my good friend, I really haven't thought about it.”

“G' on!”

“Honor bright. I couldn't sleep so I came out to the flesh-pots. What do you think about it, Monahan?”

Monahan looked uncomfortable. He stabbed a chunk of pie. “I ain't thought much about it, either.”

Donahue drank his cup of coffee, stood up and said: “Well, I'll be seeing you, Monahan.”

He went out, climbed in a taxi and said: “Head east.” When the taxi was under way, he leaned forward and thrust a dollar bill into the driver's hand.

“Duck south at the next block and let me off,” he said. “Then duck around the streets for a few minutes or go where you like. There's a dumb bunny back there tailing me.”

“Okey.”

The taxi swung south into Cornelia Street. Donahue leaped out, slammed shut the door and bounded to the sidewalk. He had barely reached the shadows when a second taxi turned the corner. He saw Monahan in the back seat. He laughed to himself, watched the tail-light disappear and then walked back to Sheridan Square.

Five minutes later a taxi drew up and the driver got out. Donahue approached him.

“Buddy,” he said, “I'll give you five dollars if you'll take me to the address where you took that fat man and the woman.”

“Says you.”

“Says I. I'm a private dick and I'm hard up for an address.” He peeled a five dollar bill from a cordovan leather

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folder.

“Get in.”

Donahue gave him the bill, entered the cab and sat back lighting a cigarette. The cab cut across town to Third Avenue and then headed north beneath the Elevated structure. At the corner of Fifteenth Street it pulled up and the driver turned around, jerking his thumb.

“Up that way, opposite Stuyvesant Square. Number two hundred and——; it's a gray brick building, kind of narrow. You want me to wait here?”

Getting out, Donahue said: “No.”

“That's swell by me.”

Donahue watched him drive off, took a few drags at his cigarette, tossed it away and turned into East Fifteenth Street. Across the way Rutherford Street ran its two blocks north, flanking Stuyvesant Square on the west. The south side of East Fifteenth faces the park and is walled by substantial stone houses marking a bygone period. Some of them have been remodeled with new fronts and modern facades and hold forth as small apartment houses. Such a one was that in front of which Donahue paused.

The lobby was flush with the sidewalk, faced with two glass doors. Donahue pushed one of them in and was confronted by a large wooden door with a shiny brass knob. On the wall at the right were built-in brass letterboxes and a row of ten brass buttons— with names under them. The door was locked. Donahue studied the names intently. Then he went out, crossed the street and looked up at the front of the house. There were only two windows lighted, the shades drawn. The windows were on the third floor, at the right.

Donahue re-entered the lobby, drew a ring of keys from his pocket. He used four master keys and spent four minutes. The door eased open and he stepped into a wide, brown-carpeted hall. One little amber wall-light burned at the foot of a wide staircase with a broad banister. The stairs were carpeted, Donahue's footfalls muted as he climbed.

He listened at the head of the staircase, turned, walked along the wall of the second floor corridor and started up a second staircase. On each floor burned a single amber light, sufficient to light one's way, but overlooking many shadows. Donahue climbed stealthily, leaving his hand off the banister because banisters invariably creak.

On the third floor he stopped, getting his bearings. At the front of the hall was a window. At either side, an apartment. There was a sliver of light beneath the door on the left. Donahue slid towards it and listened. He caught the undertones of a voice, and though he could not distinguish a word he recognized the undertones. The fat man. . . .'

He straightened suddenly and stepped quickly into the corner of the hall. The door opened and the fat man came out putting on his hat. The woman came with him. She had red hair and looked to be in her thirties, and she had beauty of a sort.

“All right, Tony ...”

“Sh!” the fat man whispered. “Everything'll be jake. Just keep a stiff lip, Beryl.”

She went with him down the hall towards the stairs, leaving her door wide open. Donahue crept along the wall, entered the apartment. He was in a comfortable living-room. Back of it was an open bedroom. He slipped into the bedroom.

In another minute the woman came in, closed the corridor door, pushed fingers through her hair. She stood in the center of the living-room, holding her hands to her head, staring haggard-eyed at the floor. Donahue appeared and said: “Good morning, Beryl.”

“Oh!” She started, tearing her hands from her head, making fists that she pressed to her thighs, and stood suddenly rigid and white-faced, her eyes wide.

Donahue scaled his hat onto a divan, sat down with his overcoat open and flaring around his neck. “Sit down, Beryl,” he said.

“How——how——”

“Go on, be a good scout, sit down.”

“Oh, my——! My——!”

He pulled out pouch and pipe, ran the bowl into the pouch, packed with his second finger. The woman kept staring at him while she moved, felt for a chair, gripped its back and let herself down slowly. Her face had drained so of color that her rouged lips looked like a vivid red gash. She began striking her fist on a knee slowly. “What

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do you want, what do you want?" Donahue reached towards an end table for a match. He glanced at the cabinet photo of a girl. The girl was young, reminiscent of the woman in the room. Donahue lit up.

He said: "When you left Tony's last night with Larrimore, what happened?"

"I wasn't at Tony's last night," she said huskily. "No?"

"No. I wasn't at Tony's."

Donahue smiled. "Why, when you came to Tony's alone at about three this morning——why did you come right out and hide behind that stoop?"

"I didn't."

"And why, after a man was thrown out, did you go back in?"

She said, hoarsely: "You seem to get around, don't you?"

"I'm a great little getter—around, Beryl. And I'm a great guy, too, once you get to know me. If you knew me better you wouldn't try to hand me a line. I don't even nibble, let alone swallow the hook."

Color was coming back to her face. She seemed to have got over the first shock and now a desperate, level look was in her eyes.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said. "My actions are my own business. Who is this Larrimore you're talking about?"

"Now, Beryl . . ." Donahue got up and stood looking down at her with eyes in which mockery danced lightly.

"Listen, you," she said, warmly. "What business have you here? Who are you?" She stood up, trembling, her eyes burning. "You have no right here. If you don't get out I'll call the police and have you put out!"

Donahue chuckled, shook his head. "No, you wouldn't call the police."

"Wouldn't I?" Her chin rose, her nostrils quivered. "You think I wouldn't?"

"I think you wouldn't."

"You're a pretty wise guy, aren't you?"

"Pretty wise."

"Well, we'll see how good your bluff is!"

She swept past him, crossed the room to an open secretary where a telephone stood, sat down, put her left hand on the telephone. Donahue took two fast strides, caught her right hand as it was drawing a small automatic from a pigeon-hole. She cried out and heaved up, tussling with him. He twisted her wrist once.

"Not in this day and age," he said, as the gun fell to the floor.

She stood panting before him, her throat pulsing, her breast convulsing, a fierce, haunted look in her eyes.

"I knew you wouldn't call the police," he said.

"Get out!" she choked. "You have no right here. For—— sake get out and leave me alone!"

He released her, kicked the little gun under the secretary. A v-shaped crease was between his brows, his brown eyes were steady and searching, his face suddenly somber and serious.

"You're in a tough spot, sister, and don't think you aren't. And don't try to play around me. I don't like it. There's been a lot of monkey-shines between the *Venetian Cellar* and this place tonight."

"If you're a cop, show your shield. If you aren't, then get out."

"I'm without benefit of shield, sister, but that cuts no ice with me. And don't think it's going to cut any with you. You're a liar, and you know it, and I'll tell you right now that I'm a swell guy ordinarily and a mean baby if anybody, jane or guy, tries to pull a rod on me. Tuck that under your belt and grow up and be your age."

He spoke crisply, bluntly, without malice or emotion, stating facts simply and pointedly.

She defied him. "I don't know what you're talking about. You have no right here."

"All right, smarty, take that telephone and call the cops and see if you have a better right to be here or in jail. There's been murder done, little girl, and this man's town still looks on murder with disfavor, despite a lot of ballyhoo to the contrary."

"Murder! Murder!" she cried. "What——what do I know about murder?"

"Nothing. Oh, nothing. Maybe you call the death of Larrimore just an act of God."

"Death of ... I——why, my ——! I haven't murdered anybody! I haven't——Oh, for —— sake, I haven't killed anybody. No! No!"

She held out her hands and fell backward, shaking her head. Her calves struck the low divan and she dropped to it.

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“And death's not enough, darling, to kill a hot clue,” Donahue muttered. “Larrimore was murdered somewhere between the *Venetian Cellar* and his hotel——”

“No! No! Oh, no!”

“You were with him in the *Venetian Cellar*. You left with him. You left the *Venetian Cellar* with him and he was shot. He was shot and got to his hotel——and he died. He died and by——he died for something——and you know! You know why he died. You know because——”

“You're a liar—a liar!” she broke in. “What do you think you can do? You can't come here and accuse me! Who do you think you are? I——”

“Never mind who I think I am. I've got that fat boy's ticket and I've got yours. And never mind what right I have to be here. I'm here and here, by cripes, I'll stay! Till you fork over, little one. It's my business——and I'm a business man.”

Her voice throbbed but became at the same time one-toned and incisive——“I was with——with a man named Larrimore, was I? Can you prove it? No. Nobody can. Because I went to the *Venetian Cellar* and backed out because they were arguing with some pest . . . what's that to you? I . . . went there because a friend there is a good friend of mine. And that's none of your business, either. You handed me a jolt when I first saw you here. You' handed me a jolt when you mentioned murder. It's an ugly word. But that's all there is to it. Go on. Run along. I'm getting tired of you already.”

“You're like that lizard called the chameleon,” Donahue said. “You change color quickly——but underneath you don't. You can't bluff me'.”

He toed the little gun from beneath the secretary, picked it up. It was a .25 Webley, four-and-a-half inches over all. It was fully loaded. Donahue rubbed the muzzle with his handkerchief.

“Never been used, eh?”

She said nothing.

“Oh,” Donahue said, shrugging, “I don't think you killed Larrimore. But you know who did.”

“I don't! I tell you I don't know what you're talking about!” She jumped up. “For the love o'——get out——before I do something——before I scream!”

“Don't scream, Beryl,” said the fat man from the door. “I'll take care of this buttinsky.”

Donahue wheeled about.

The fat man stood in the open-door holding a gun in his hand and looking very sinister with his-drooping eyelids.

## Six Deadly Dames

### IV

DONAHUE had taken the clip from the Webley, ejected a cartridge from the chamber. He threw the lot on the desk and when he looked at the fat man again the latter had come in and closed the door.

The woman stood digging her fingernails into her palms, biting her lips to silence, looking as if she were torn between two diverging lines of thought.

"I told you to get out of one place tonight," the fat man said in a low, grinding voice.

"Tony——"

"Shut up, Beryl. This guy's pal is standing over on the corner of Rutherford. I saw him before I went out in the lobby, and stayed down there watching. I didn't know this egg was up here——until I heard him just now."

Donahue looked puzzled. He said: "What are you yapping about? I've got no pal——"

"You're just about the damnedest liar I ever ran across. What kind of a line did he hand you, Beryl?"

"On——oh, a lot of nonsense about a man named Larrimore."

"That's what he did me too."

"Run him out, Tony. He's been talking about Larrimore being murdered and he's trying to charge me with being mixed up in it."

"I'll show him," the fat man said. "I'll show you. I've got a mind to blow your brains out, you lousy pest!"

"Tony!"

"Nah, don't worry, baby——I won't. But I've got a friend; right in this neighborhood who's on the cops. I'll show this bum if he can bust around here the way he does. He's a heel, Beryl——a dirty, rotten gunman, with his pal across the street. I'll get him pinched. Keep your hands up, bright boy."

The fat man, who looked genuinely angry and indignant, backed to the telephone, kept his gun trained on Donahue, and called a number.

"Hello——hello. . . . This is Tony——you know. . . . Well, I'm sorry to get you up, Mike, but listen, do me a favor. There's a hot shot up here at my girl friend's, you know——in Fifteenth Street. . . . Yeah, that's the place. He's heeled but I've got him covered, and he's got a pal hanging across the street. . . . Do me a favor and pick the pal up and then come here and pick up this guy. . . . Well, he's got an idea in his nut that me and Beryl bumped some guy off. . . . Yeah, imagine that! . . . Will you? . . . Thanks a lot, old pal."

He hung up. "Well, big boy, what do you think of that?"

"Swell, for the time being. But what do you think you're going to get out of it?"

"The satisfaction of seeing you get a rough deal from the cops."

Donahue looked from the fat man to the girl. Her lips were tight, she was grinding the bent knuckles of one hand into the palm of the other. The fat man looked formidable, lowering, his black fedora pulled down to his thick eyebrows.

"So you want to turn me over to the cops," Donahue said. "That's funny, because I like cops."

He went on talking, rambling aimlessly, wisecracking and chiding the fat man and the woman. He appeared cheerful and nonchalant, but deep in his hard brown eyes two tiny flames burned steadily, warily——and in the set of his neck was tension.

"Oh, shut up, shut up!" cried the woman, a note of hysteria in her voice.

"You wouldn't turn me over to the cops," Donahue said, lying his way on and on. "I know you two. I know you from cradles onward. The both of you. I know too much about you. You wouldn't be fools enough to throw me to the cops. What I know about you, Beryl, would fill a book. And you, Tony, you moon-faced spaghetti-bender. I don't care if you do know a dick named Mike So-and-so."

"Pipe down!" growled the fat man.

"Not on your natural, kid. You can't make me pipe down. You're yellow, you beef-faced jerk. You wouldn't dare use that rod. You carry it for show. The only chance I'd have of getting plugged by you would be if the gun went off accidentally. You're just a punk."

"Damn you, shut up!"

"Make me."

## Six Deadly Dames

The fat man came forward, his eyes muggy, his lip curling.

"I tell you, shut up!" he choked.

The woman beat her temples with her fists and cried:

"Oh, ——! . . ." She threw herself violently on to the divan, picked up a pillow, punched it, threw it down again, clawed at her hair and rose. "For——sake, Tony——"

"Be quiet, Beryl."

"Tony——"

"Shut up!"

She swallowed hard.

A buzzer sounded.

"Get that, Beryl," Tony said.

She went numbly across the room towards the door, beside which was an ivory push-button. She arched her back, pressed the button. Then suddenly she choked and slumped to the floor, rolled over and lay in a dead faint.

"Don't worry about her," the fat man said.

Presently there was a knock on the door.

"Come in," the fat man said.

The door swung open. A neat, tall man stood there with his hands in his pocket, chewing on a cigar, half-smiling.

"You look funny with that gun, Tony."

"Come in, Mike. And collar this bird."

"I picked up a couple of harness bulls on Lexington and we've got the other guy downstairs. What's it all about, Tony? Oh——oh, Beryl pass out?"

"Can you blame her, with this guy picking on us?"

The fat man talked at length, and the other listened and rolled his cigar back and forth and kept looking from Tony to Donahue with polite interest.

"All right, Tony," he said, "I'll take him over to the precinct."

"Yeah?" said Donahue. "Well, if you take me, brother, you'll take him too."

"Now don't give me any lip. Get your hat and come along."

The fat man said: "See if he's heeled, Mike."

"Ain't he had his rod out yet?"

Donahue said: "When I pull a rod, I mean it. Not like this guy here."

"Stick that in his back, Tony, while I take it. This guy sure acts tough. Keep your hands way up, brother."

He removed Donahue's gun from its armpit holster, hefted it and unlocked the safety in a kid-gloved hand.

"Get Beryl too, Tony," he said. "Then you better come around to the precinct and we'll thrash this thing out. On your way, you," he said to Donahue.

Donahue scowled at the fat man. "Don't forget what your boy friend just said."

"Get," said the laconic boy friend.

Donahue jabbed him with a contemptuous look, then strode out of the room and down the corridor.

"Hey, take it easy."

Donahue stopped short at the head of the staircase and spun around. "Listen; use your head. You're not getting anywhere by hauling me over the coals. I'm a right guy, copper." He began gesturing with his hat.

"Get down them stairs."

"On the up and up now, give me a break. You're just wasting your time by dragging me over. No kidding. I tell you, I'm strictly kosher. Tony's the guy you want. The fat boy and the jane. Not me." He tapped the man's chest with a forefinger. The man stiffened. "Listen, copper. Honest. Don't arrest me. Please. I ask you in a nice way. And don't press that gat in my stomach that way."

He winced and put his hand on barrel of the gun. The gun pressed harder, the men's eyes locked.

"You fool, take your hand off that gun or I'll let you have a bellyful!"

Donahue's forefinger shot forward almost imperceptibly, closing the safety. At the same time he gripped the gun hard and heaved it and the man's hand outward and upward, his finger tight on the safety.

The man snarled in his throat, tussled. Donahue hit him with a hard short left to the point of the jaw and both

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went tumbling down the stairs. They landed sprawling at the bottom.

“You will, will you?” rasped Donahue. “You will try to fake you're a cop! What a laugh you hand me!”

“Let go this rod!”

They heaved up, wheeled around, crashed against the

wall. Donahue cut loose with his left again. The blow caught the man on the jaw and slammed his head against the wall. He cursed and Donahue planted a hard left in his stomach, followed with another to the jaw and a third between the eyes.

By sheer force he tore his gun from the man's hand, flattened him against the wall with the gun jammed against his stomach. With lightning-like speed he took the man's own gun, a .45, from its armpit-holster, released the safety.

“Now get downstairs,” he said.

The man hesitated.

Donahue clouted him with one of the guns and booted him along. People in the house were stirring. Donahue drove the man down to the main hall and kept prodding him towards the lobby. He made him open the inner door. He planted him against the wall of the lobby with his two guns.

“Now, you poor dumb heel,” he rasped, “what about the other guy standing across the street?”

“Hell! Go out and find out!”

“Listen, you! So help me living——!”

“It was a stall. There wasn't any guy out there. I didn't see any. It was just a stall. I was fooling you.”

“It was, eh?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, pipe this, sweetheart. I don't fall for that. I want it straight.”

“I told you straight.”

Donahue cracked him across the jaw with a gun-barrel. “Did you?” he said, all playfulness gone from his manner. “Did you? No, you didn't, you louse! No, you didn't!”

The man crouched against the wall, his teeth drawing blood to his lips, murder and hatred and fear toiling in his eyes. He did not look so neat now, nor was he as laconic as he had been.

Sounds increased in the house. There were voices in the corridors and a bell ringing somewhere.

“Get it out,” grated Donahue. “Give it to me straight.”

Blood dripped from the man's cheek, from the lips he had bitten.

The inner door whipped open and a group of men in bathrobes bunched there. Before Donahue could say a word they sailed upon him.

“Here——here!” Donahue snapped. “Let go! I'm——”

From the hall yelled the fat man “Get him! He tried to waylay me in the hall! The two of them!”

The man who had been laconic——and wasn't now—— ducked out through the swing doors. The fat man barged through and tore after him.

“You damned fools, *let go!*” roared Donahue.

Anger in him became fury. Fury gave him wild, devastating strength and cyclonic speed. He tossed one man clear over his head, floored another with a swung gun, kicked another, drove a fourth reeling back into the hall. He still had the two guns. He gripped them hard. He kicked open a swing door and poised outside, hefting his guns.

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### V

THE TOP OF HIS HAT was crushed in. The wind caught his baggy coat and ballooned it, flapped his upturned collar. He saw the fat man and the other running side by side; saw the latter receive the fat man's gun. Beyond, near Third Avenue, was a parked car, with no tail-light. The fat man and the other ran across the street towards it.

Because the men in the lobby were picking themselves up and gathering for a new attack, Donahue ran out to the sidewalk and slid along the house-fronts. He saw the fat man and his boy friend reach the parked car. They looked back. Donahue was hiding in the shadow of a facade. His hands were hard on the guns.

He heard the roar of the motor as the fat man and the other climbed in. Donahue knelt down on one knee, raised his left arm, laid the gun in his right hand across the crook of his elbow, aimed. Three times the black muzzle spewed jets of flame, and the echoes banged violently in the street.

He saw the car start to limp off. He had ruined the rear left tire. Still kneeling, still aiming, he fired again—broke an unlighted spotlight attached to the left of the windshield. The car turned north on Third Avenue and Donahue broke into a long-legged, bounding run. He saw it bouncing up the avenue on its flat tire, swinging among the Elevated pillars. Donahue knelt between the street-car tracks, took aim again over his left arm, cut loose with the remaining three shots in his gun. He blew out the right rear tire, switched the .45 to his right hand and raced up the side-walk. He was half a block from the car when it swung east into Eighteenth Street. He stopped short, raised the .45 and put five shots through the long hood. He piled in a doorway as a half dozen jets of flame issued from the tonneau; slipped a fresh clip into his own gun, switched it to his right hand, gripped the .45 in his left and started off again.

Turning the corner, he saw the car half-way down Eighteenth Street. But he didn't hear its motor, and he saw men piling from its door: four men. He let fly with a shot from his left hand, and the men pounded for the sidewalk. One of them didn't reach it; he plunged headlong into the gutter. Donahue flattened against a house as one gun spoke twice and two bullets whistled past and shattered a window.

The neighborhood crackled with the dying echoes of gun shots. Somewhere far distant a police whistle shrilled. Donahue heard the pound of running feet again and saw three men racing towards First Avenue. He left the house wall and broke into a run. He had gone but a dozen steps when he saw gun flashes at the end of the street. He stopped in his tracks, saw the darting figures of three men; saw other figures—cops, uniformed cops.

He went on at a fast walk until he came to the form of the man in the gutter. He bent down. The man was on his face. Donahue turned him over. It was the man who had been laconic. He was dead, his gun frozen in his hand—the gun the fat man had passed him in Fifteenth Street.

Donahue looked up. Over on First Avenue the guns were still banging. Donahue shoved his guns in his pockets and started off on the run. He reached the intersection and looked north. He saw two cops crouched behind a truck on the west side of the street. They were firing across towards the opposite sidewalk, and jets of flame spat from a dark doorway, bullets rang in the metal of the truck.

A taxicab was parked nearby, its driver crouching in a doorway. Feet hammered up the avenue and two more cops came on the run, guns drawn. A few windows grated open but no lights appeared. Donahue leaned at the corner and watched the exchange of shots across the street. The two running cops slowed down, held their guns out, advanced cautiously. In a brief lull they broke into a run and joined the two behind the truck. The firing opened again.

The taxi driver in the doorway said: "Jeeze, those guys mean business!"

"Yeah," said Donahue.

Stray shots broke windows. Glass rained down, wood splintered, brick chipped off.

A siren moaned up the avenue and the headlights of a police car rushed through the darkness. It pulled up at the northwest corner of Fifteenth Street. Uniformed men jumped off, and two carried sub-machine guns, one carried a riot gun. The men behind the truck yelled instructions.

The men from the riot car got a line on the doorway from which the flame issued and two sub-machine guns began to hammer. One kept hammering while the man with the other ran up to join the men behind the truck.



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Then it opened fire, its mad stutter raising unholy bedlam in the street.

Cops began to appear from all directions. Another police car arrived. People appeared warily, got bolder. Soon a crowd was formed, and the policemen had to drive them back. Nightsticks waved, commands were harsh and urgent. The machine-guns poured stream after stream of lead into the doorway. A powerful searchlight was thrown on the doorway. It revealed brick pockmarked with bullets, glass shattered, wood splintered and shining in long tears. And mixed with the bedlam of the guns were the cries and exclamations of women, the excited shouting of policemen, the arrival of more cars and the wailing of sirens.

A cop reported to a sergeant within earshot of Donahue: "A guy dead in the gutter up Eighteenth—and a car with two flats and a busted hood."

"Go up there and watch it. Anybody in the car?"

"No."

"All right, go up there."

Donahue lit a cigarette, turned and walked away. He pushed through the crowd, reached the fringe of it and headed south. The wind blew sparks from his cigarette and there was a brown grim look about his mouth. He reached Fifteenth Street, turned east, crossed Second Avenue on the south side of the street.

He could see that many of the windows were lighted — now in the small apartment house. He saw a couple of men out front. He saw a policeman twirling his stick and listening, and then he saw Monahan. He did not slow down. He kept right on walking until he reached the group and then he stopped. He stopped and he eyed Monahan with a withering hard look.

"Hello, Monahan," he said dully.

One of the men in the doorway said: "That's the man!"

The cop wheeled, gripped his stick hard. "Hey, you!"

Donahue overlooked him. He kept looking at Monahan. His face was stony, his eyes cutting, and there was a bitter twist to his mouth. He looked angry—angry and filled with loathing.

"So you did tail me after all, Monahan," he said.

"Now be reasonable, Donahue——"

"Be reasonable your sweet aunt's eye! And just like you, you went and balled up the whole shooting match. You copied every move I made, you dirty poacher. So it was you was hiding out here. Why didn't you give me a hand when there was action?"

"Jeeze, Donahue, I was in that car——"

"You were in that car too, I suppose, when you saw me look at that stiff in the street. But you didn't come out. You thought there might be more fireworks. You let me go and then you sneaked back here to try to steal a march on me. A poacher, Monahan—that's you all over your dirty face."

"Now look here, jazzbo," the cop broke in.

"And you," Donahue snapped. "I don't like that word jazzbo from any harness bull. Keep your jaw out of this."

"He was the man that struck us," repeated the man in the doorway.

Donahue looked up at him. "Oh, go inside and put your pants on."

"Did you bust these people?" snarled the cop.

"Sure I did. I had a red-hot in my hands and they jumped me. The result of that is all the banging you hear up on Eighteenth Street. Now don't take yourself serious, officer. I was on a hot tail. I had it sewed up, only this thick mick Monahan got his fingers in the pie. When the cops up on Eighteenth Street finish with the wipers they're after they won't know what all the shooting's about. I had it sewed up ——get me? Sewed up! Until this"——he looked at Monahan—— "until this—— Oh, what the hell's the use!"

"Hell, Donahue," Monahan complained, "don't blame me. I was only trying to do my duty——"

"Duty? Why, you two-faced So-and-so, you were after the same thing I was. A pinch, to make a reputation and to get a probable reward. Don't tell any fairy stories, Monahan. It doesn't fit you at all."

The cop poked him with his nightstick. "Now cut out the arguing. What I want to know is, what was all this about? Never mind any beefing. Just spring a little information. We're trying to find out where the hell in this place the trouble started."

Donahue knocked the nightstick aside, "Don't get free with that, copper. Not on me. I'm touchy."

Monahan was nervous. "Donahue, be reasonable. We can all share——"

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Donahue, his nerves raw, his temper at its peak, took one step and made a furious swing at Monahan. Monahan ducked so fast that he fell down. The cop gripped Donahue and spun him around.

“One more break like that, Donahue, and I'll crown you!”

“I never saw,” Monahan said, “such a guy!”

Donahue glared at the cop. “Call Headquarters,” he said. “Tell Detective—Sergeant Kelly McPard to come over.”

“Why?”

Donahue said: “Grab hold of that guy Monahan and hold him!”

“Look here, Donahue!” Monahan cried.

“Grab him!” Donahue shouted.

The cop cursed and grabbed Monahan, saying: “I didn't like your story in the first place!”

They went inside to an apartment on the first floor. Monahan couldn't speak. He was flabbergasted. Far away the sounds of shooting were beginning to diminish. Baffled and angry, the cop used a telephone. He asked for Kelly McPard. Kelly McPard was over at the morgue. He called the morgue.

“Sergeant McPard? . . . This is Patrolman Swansen.”

While he spoke Donahue looked out into the corridor. He stepped out casually, moved towards the staircase, then began climbing. When he reached the first landing he looked down. Then he went on, swiftly—climbed the next staircase two steps at a time. Listened again. Then he went down the corridor and stopped before the door at the left. He tried the knob cautiously. The door was locked. He looked around. Halfway down—the hall a door stood open, the occupant of the apartment was downstairs.

Donahue stepped back, gathered his strength and rushed his shoulder against the door. He smashed the lock and burst into the living—room.

Beryl was standing in the middle of the room, holding the .25 Webley. It barked as Donahue lunged, holding out his left hand. The bullet pierced his hand, was deflected, and glanced off his cheek, leaving a silver—like streak. He crashed into the woman, grabbing her gun hand. A second and third shot thudded into the floor. He ripped the gun from her hand with his bloody left hand. He grabbed her with his right and hauled her out of the room, down the hall, into the vacated apartment. He slammed the door, locked it, turned on her and backed her across the room. He set her down in an overstuffed chair.

He took out a handkerchief and wrapped it around his wounded hand. He picked up the telephone and called the *City Press*. He asked for Libbey. He waited half a minute. '

“Libbey? . . . This is Donny, you old soak. Hang on and get your pencil poised. I've got a red—hot here. Hang on.” He set the phone down on the oblong library table. He pulled a chair up to it. He looked at the woman. “Sit down there,” he said.

Her eyes looked green, glazed, murderous. Her red hair stood on end. She didn't move. Donahue pulled her up and shoved her into the chair, pushed it closer to the table so that she faced the telephone. Then he went around to the other side of the table, sat down on another chair and drew out both guns.—“Get it out,” he said. “As I came in the door you fired and wounded me in the hand. I grabbed you and took the gun away from you.”

She began to laugh hysterically, in a cracked, mad voice. “You fool—you fool. I took poison—just before you came. I saw the knob turning. I took poison. A double overdose of veronal. Laugh that off! In a few minutes I'll be out of all this. I'll never burn, damn you!”

She seemed not to notice the telephone. She stared at Donahue with green burning hatred.

Donahue spoke in a low whisper. “You took the easy way out, but I can make it harder.” He moved his guns. “I can make it messy and harder—with these.”

Her eyes widened, staring at the black muzzles. “You're a killer, Beryl. I can see it in your eyes. You killed Larrimore.”

“In a few minutes—”

“I can still cut the time short with—these.”

The whites of her eyes shone. Suddenly she screamed.

“Yes, I killed Larrimore! I killed him—killed him—killed him!”

“You killed him.”

“I said I killed him!” she screamed. “Yes, and meant to. What does it mean now? I fooled you. I'll not burn.

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Larrimore thought he was smart——smart. And I——showed him.”

“Why? What did he do?”

“You mean what was he trying to do! The snooper. I put him on the spot.”

“Why?”

Down below there were shouts and men running around, yelling up and down the stairways, trying doors.

Donahue said: “Tony and the rest just got smoked out. You heard the shooting. The cops got them.”

“Tony!” she cried, with bitter scorn. “He ran out on me. I asked him to stay——pleaded with him. The lousy bum had to go down the stairs. He said he would be back. He didn’t come back. And he left without paying me.”

“Paying you?”

“Yes, you fool! Do you think I would have shot Larrimore for love? I was paid. You never heard of a jane yet who got a guy on the spot, did you? Well, you’re hearing one now!”

She picked up a book and flung it on the floor. “Larrimore was just a nosy newspaperman,” she rattled on. “He got some dope and he tailed it down. Tony, the bum, was a pay-off man for that vice ring the cops have been trying to run down. Larrimore began to nose around the *Venetian Cellar*. He had brains, that guy. It was tough. I had to smoke him——but the dough looked good.”

Men were in the hall outside now.

Donahue urged: “Keep it up, keep it up.”

“What will you get out of it? I can feel the heart now. ... So this guy Larrimore hangs around Tony’s for a few nights. But Tony didn’t know who he was then. Larrimore was getting the lay of the land all the time. Every night he was there he picked up one of Tony’s janes. He never picked the same one twice. After the janes began to compare notes it comes out that Larrimore would do nothing but take them to swell night-clubs and then send them away in a taxi. He always called himself Jack. He used to get them tight and then send them away so drunk they couldn’t remember what they’d said.

“Tony began to get worried. So then one little dame comes back after one of those sessions with a stroke of con science. She used to be a friend of Magistrate Paglioni——”

“Who?”

“The boss of the vice ring. Magistrate Paglioni. Or he was a magistrate till last month. He resigned because the vice ring takes most of his time and there’s more money in it. He lives in class now.

“This little dame says she can’t remember whether she bragged about her playmate days with Paglioni, but she thought she did. She said Larrimore got her pretty drunk. But she did remember——she did remember that some guy slapped Larrimore on the back in one of those night-clubs and called him——Larrimore.

“Tony got a line on him. Get it? Larrimore, the newspaperman. The guy that’s been exposing things for the last year. Tony went to the boss. Paglioni went crazy——almost. I’ll tell it. Didn’t Paglioni give me the air once? I’ll tell it. Paglioni tells Tony to get rid of Larrimore.

“So I’m called in. How do you like that? I’m camped in and Tony says it’s worth five thousand to bump off Larrimore. I angled so that Larrimore picked me up. He picked me up in Tony’s.”

Fists pounded on the door.

“Keep going,” Donahue said.

“We hung around and drank and then he said we should go somewhere else. To a ritzy place. I said sure. See, he never figured there would be any danger from a jane. He never figured that I packed a rod. I had it, baby, in my purse. We had the cab all ready. The guy who came in and took you out before——he drove it. It was parked outside, waiting.

“Larrimore and I got in and we drove off. We went over to Third Avenue and started north. I was a little tight and nervous, because I hadn’t bumped off a guy in a year and I was using a new gun. I heard an Elevated train coming up. I thought quick. I told Larrimore I would like some bourbon and pointed to a door where I said he could get some. Mike pulled up to the curb.

“Larrimore backed out, but he was suspicious. He looked it anyhow. He stood on the curb as the Elevated roared by overhead and then I let him have it. He dropped like a log. I was sure I’d finished him. I told Mike to drive off.”

Donahue heard the fists pounding at the door. He heard a key grating and withdrawn. But he was transfixed by the woman. Age had crept upon her. She looked haggard and vicious and dissipated. She was no longer the superb

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actress she had been earlier in the morning. Donahue, who had seen crime in its many strata, looked upon a gun-woman for the first time.

“Open this door or I'll break it down!”

Green-eyed, the woman clutched at her breast. “Say, let's have a gun. Let me blow those cops apart when they break in. Give me a break—before—I go.”

Donahue, who had a stomach for nasty sights, shuddered and began to wear a sickly look. Blindly, the—woman flung herself across the desk, tried to grab one of his guns. He had no difficulty preventing her. She whimpered and lay on the table.

Donahue pocketed his guns, rose, picked up the telephone. “Hello, Libbey. . . . The name? Downstairs on the door it says Miss Beryl Mercine. . . . No, not mercy—M-e-r-c-i-n-e. . . . That's right. . . . She's lying on the desk now, dead, I believe. . . . She says veronal. I wouldn't know. . . . Will that make the daylight editions? . . . Just, eh? Good. . . . Oh, that noise you hear is a hot-headed cop about to break in. . . . Now remember, sweetheart, the Interstate Detective Agency nabbed this case, with Donahue, if you please, to be credited. Don't by any chance slip in any such name as Monahan—Just a minute, Libbey. Hang on.” The door had burst inward. The patrolman loomed there with his gun drawn. A man in plain-clothes held a gun. Behind them, looking over their heads, was rosy-cheeked Kelly McPard, and farther back, Monahan.

The patrolman stamped in, red-faced, angry. “What the hell's the idea? I've been, looking all over this dump for you!”

Monahan yapped: “It was a trick! See! He's got a woman!”

Kelly McPard came in, wearing his fixed cherubic smile. He crossed to the woman, took hold of her hair, lifted her head, looked at her face and let the head down again. Then he looked at Donahue, who was sitting on the desk, holding the phone in both hands and dangling one foot.

“Well, well, Donny, everybody is mad at you,” he said. “I see your hand is all messed up. Tsk! Tsk! What's all the noise, and who's the woman?”

“Beryl Mercine, who murdered one A. B. Larrimore and then died by her own hand.”

Kelly McPard almost lost his smile. But not quite. “I feel downhearted, Donny. I'm just after finding a woman's fingerprints on that cigarette case I picked up, you remember. But it was a woman who was supposed to be out in Akron now. Bernice Marks. Also Barbara Markall. Also—he nodded towards the woman on the desk—“this woman. Good, good work, Donny.”

“But, Sarge,” said the patrolman, “he went and—”

“And,” broke in Monahan, “he said I was mixed up in it. I want an apology!”

Wearily, Donahue spoke into the telephone. “Libbey. . . . Say that Detective-Sergeant Kelly McPard was on the scene ten minutes after I was shot by the woman. He took full command in a very aggressive and thorough manner. . . . That's right. And also—also, Libbey, mention Monahan's name. . . . Yeah, good old Monahan. Mention the fact that I saved Monahan from being taken for a ride. He was already in the car. I shot the gunmen smack out of the car. Monahan has just asked me to apologize. I here-by apologize.”

Kelly McPard laughed.

Monahan said: “I'm going. I see I can't depend on *any* of my friends any more.” He glared at McPard.

McPard said nothing, only winked at Monahan good-naturedly, and Monahan, bristling at the wink, turned and stamped out.

Donahue said: “Monahan . . . on the way down the stairs, Monahan, please fall and break your neck.”

## Save Your Tears

THE CHAMP, Harrigan, took one on the chin and piled into the ropes above the press-box. Three blows made sopping sounds against his ribs. He laughed. It was an intimate laugh, close against Tripp's face, as they clinched. The referee bounced in, slapping them. The champ tossed Tripp off. The referee waltzed backward, bent, over, fingers splayed, his monkey face screwed up tensely, his lower lip jutting upward over the upper.

It was only the third round. It had been noised around that the fight would go the limit—fifteen. The odds were seven to five in the champ's favor. He was a big fellow, a kid—twenty-one or two, fighting out of Giles Consadine's stable. He was not particularly sweet to look at, but he had a nice smile, a nice laugh, and he was the champ.

Rushing Tripp to the ropes, slamming him with both hands, he looked over the challenger's shoulder, smiled at Token Moore. She waved, showed her fine set of teeth between luscious lips. The champ was crazy about her. But there was something peculiar in his smile. Giles Consadine, lean, slightly gray, sat next to Token Moore. He sat wooden-faced, his hands folded on the silver knob of an evening stick. The bell broke up the clinch.

They came out for the fourth, reached the center of the ring. Harrigan ducked. Then he piled two hard ones into Tripp's face.

Tripp clinched, muttered: "Yuh mugg!"

Harrigan laughed, danced away. He began dancing backward around the ring. He looked down over the ropes at Token, at Giles Consadine. Tripp jumped him but the champ was nimble for a big man. He tied Tripp up, broke, tossed him away, went after him. He stopped smiling and his jaw set, bulged. He carried Tripp to the ropes above the press-box. The wet gloves smacked, sopped; they were the champ's gloves. Blood flew, spread like a comet across a newshawk's cheek below. And suddenly the gloves stopped.

The referee was bending over Tripp.

The champ was not looking at him. Nor at the man on the floor. He was looking through the ropes, down at Token Moore, at Giles Consadine. He wore a dizzy grin. And he was laughing. The short, idiotic laughs thumped his chest, pumped his cheeks out and in. Nobody heard the laughs. He just looked as if he had the hiccups.

Giles Consadine was standing, expressionless, lifting a match to a long thin panetela. Token Moore was round-eyed. About them, Consadine's yes-men jabbered, gesticulated. But you couldn't hear what they said. Shouts, roars, screams, laughs, rose to the distant dome of the Arena, cascaded down again.

The newsreel cameras were in the ring, turning. Tripp was on a stretcher; two men carried him from the ring. The champ was glassy-eyed and trying to poke his way clear of the mob in the ring. A man was holding up a microphone, shouting for him. The champ did a breast-stroke for the ropes, swung through.

Consadine, inhaling deeply, let smoke languish from his nostrils. He was laconic, a little abstracted. "That's that, then," he said, half to himself.

Token Moore gave the impression of a bird fluttering, looking for a place to alight. She fell on Consadine's arm. He hardly noticed her. But a tap on the shoulder made him turn, look around.

Donahue, lean and brown-faced above a single-studded stiff shirtfront, said: "Greetings, Consadine. The kid's a natural."

Consadine was short with him, clipped: "Thanks." Turning front, the fight solon bent his wiry gray brows, frowned thoughtfully. He turned around again.

But Donahue was gone.

Token said: "Who—who was the handsome well-wisher?"

"A private dick."

## Six Deadly Dames

### II

DONAHUE MADE HIS WAY to the back of the Arena, opened a door marked private. A short hallway lay beyond. It contained but one door. The door was broad, of metal, and had no knob. Donahue pressed a buzzer.

In a moment the door slid open and Donahue walked into a large elevator.

“Deep down,” he said.

His overcoat was over his arm. He wore a black velour hat slanted over one ear. Humming to himself, he drew from time to time on a cigarette as the car descended. When the car stopped, opened, he drifted into a severely modernistic foyer. A girl in trim black and white took his hat and overcoat and he drifted to one end of the foyer, pushed open a door and entered an elaborate bar. It was crowded, noisy; and beyond, in the vast dining- and dancing-room, a Negro band was playing. The allegorical murals ' on the walls were in keeping with the name of the *Suwanee Club*. Giles Consadine did most things lavishly.

Donahue pushed into a telephone booth, dialed a number. A woman answered the phone and he asked for Karssen; waited, tapping his foot, whistling to himself. When Karssen answered, Donahue said:

“The champ put the works to Tripp in the fourth. ... A knockout is right. . . . Well, there's something screwy about it. I'd have bet my shirt Tripp was to win. . . . Not a chance. When the champ got busy Tripp didn't have a chance. . . . That's all so far, Alex.”

He hung up, squeezed out of the booth and came face to face with Detective-Sergeant Kelly McPard.

“Donny, as I live and breathe!”

“Me and my shadow. How're you, Kel?”

“Just swell, just swell.” He used a neat, manicured fingernail to snick Donahue's single shirt stud. “You look like a million. I never knew you went in for following the fights in a big way. Seems I've seen you at all of them for the past three months. Cleaning up, old kid?”

Donahue said: “I got this suit for a Christmas present. I don't like the theatre. I had to wear it somewhere.”

McPard squeezed Donahue's arm affectionately. McPard was a large man—large in the torso, thin in the legs. His feet tapered off in pointed shoes forever aglow with a high polish. He wore a tailored suit, a tailored overcoat. His starched collar was snug about his plump neck. He was a clean-looking, pink-cheeked man, wily behind the merry twinkle in his eyes and the amused smile that never quite left his lips.

He poked Donahue's ribs, said: “I picked up a hundred bucks on that little brawl, Donny. Not bad for a copper, huh? Hey . . . once I was a roundsman when Danny Harrigan was a kid. He was nuts about my uniform. Wanted to be a cop. Now look at him! Champ! . . . Come on, Donny; I'll buy you a drink.”

The head bartender was signaling. “Oh, Mr. Donahue there!”

“Yeah?”

“Mr. Consadine wants to see you.”

“It's free. Tell him to come down.”

“He says upstairs—his office.”

Donahue, leaning elbows on the bar, said: “I can't. My pal's buying me a drink. It might never happen again. Make it a double Scotch, Rudolph, with a bottle of Perrier on the side.”

The head bartender looked pained. “But I'm hangin' on the phone here and the boss——”

Kelly McPard chimed in: “Why act like that, Donny? Go up and see him.”

“I just came down. You think I'm going to spend the rest of the night chasing up and down in the elevator? Tell him,” Donahue said to the bartender, “I'm engaged. No—— wait a minute. I'll go up. Tell him I'll be up.”

McPard said: “Tsk, tsk! What a man!”

Donahue stretched his long legs to the foyer, entered the waiting elevator and said “Top” to the attendant. The car rose to the top floor. Sliding doors opened and Donahue entered a carpeted anteroom on either side of which stood a Grecian urn. Three doors faced him. He headed towards the one marked Private, opened it. He did not hurry.

Consadine was seated in a tremendous red leather chair. He was fully dressed, hat on, white silk muffler bunching between the lapels of his black overcoat. He sat well back, legs crossed, and he tapped the patent leather

## Six Deadly Dames

toe of one foot with the end of his walking stick. Kempler, a small, chubby man with a squashed nose and close-fitting ears, sat on the mahogany desk spinning a small penknife at the end of a platinum watch chain. He looked as if he had been shoehorned into his evening clothes.

Donahue elbowed the door shut. "Mohamet comes to the mountain, Consadine."

Consadine's face was wooden. "Win any dough on the scrap?"

"Didn't bet."

"Since when did you begin to follow the fights?"

"I take it in spells."

"This spell began about three months ago, didn't it?"

"You figure close."

"I noticed you behind me in every scrap I attended in the past three months. Kempler noticed it, too."

"Yeah," said Kempler.

Consadine said: "You've been dropping in at the gym, too."

"Sure," nodded Donahue.

: "Going to write a book or something about the game?"

"No."

"Why the sudden lively interest?"

"Hobby," said Donahue, good-humored.

Consadine said: "Take a tip, I don't like strangers hanging around my stables."

"I get tossed out if I show up again, huh?"

"That's the idea. And that goes for the *Suwanee Club*, too. You've been practically living there. Stay out of it."

"In other words——"

"In other words," said Consadine, wooden-faced, unemotional, "keep your nose clean."

"Yeah," said Kempler.

"Finished?" Donahue said.

Consadine said: "Yes, you can go now." Donahue turned, opened the door. He stood for a moment on the threshold, smiling at Consadine.

"Keep yours clean," he said.

Kempler thumped off the desk, lumbered over and said:

"What?"

"I wasn't talking to you."

"What?"

"Nerts."

"What?"

Consadine said: "Lay off, Kempler." Kempler lumbered back to the desk, turned, scowled at Donahue.

Donahue said to Consadine: "B-r-r-r! He scares hell out; of me, Consadine." His voice dropped: "You do, too." He chuckled, went out, closed the door.

## Six Deadly Dames

### III

ALEX KARSSSEN was head of the Boxing Commission. He was a small bag of bones, five feet four, and he had a lopsided, leathery face, a tyrant's bright eye tempered by an amazing sparkle, crooked teeth that nonetheless could produce a winning, dynamic smile. He spoke quickly, sharply, out of his warped mouth.

"In here, Donny, my boy." He shoved and punched Donahue into a small study whose door, now closed, muffled the music in the salon.

Karssen was socially prominent. His Fifth Avenue house was the scene of many bright affairs and it was said of him that he entertained every night.

He was eager. "What happened, Donny?"

"Nothing much. Only Consadine's wise. He may not know for sure, but he's got a bug in his brain—he suspects me. *I was told*"—he grinned slowly—"to keep out of his gym, out of his *Suwanee* scatter."

Karssen's bright eyes darted about in space, he rubbed thumb frantically against forefinger. "What do you think, boy?"

"Only this: something went wrong. I don't say Tripp was to 've knocked Harrigan out. Nothing like it. But I do say Tripp was to 've stayed the fifteen, to a close decision. The "fight started out like big-time. The two guys smacked hell out of each other. Tripp's been the only logical contender for the past two years. He was built up nicely. I say he was to 've lost this scrap, but by such a slight margin that a return bout would have been down on the books before their gloves were dry. As it is, Tripp's a has-been. There's no contender on the horizon. Consadine is going to lose dough on the champ. Why? Because there's nobody for the champ to fight."

Karssen bobbed his shriveled head. "Right! Right! That sounds reasonable. The fight was to have been in the bag. Both sides in agreement. A close, fast fight. A close decision. A return bout inside of six months and the public milked of another several hundred thousand dollars! Capital!"

Donahue dug in "Referee fixed, judges spoken to. Not only in this fight but in the other fights Tripp had preparatory to the championship match. He's a good man—but the champ is a wow. He's the best—Tripp is—of the white hopes."

Karssen rattled on: "Somebody double-crossed the inner ring. Forgetting the actual money transaction of the bout itself, there must have been thousands bet on the outside. Get this, boy: Giles Consadine either lost a fortune on this bout—or made a fortune. It could have worked either way."

Donahue frowned. "What I'm worried about is, Consadine's got an idea I've been soft-shoeing up his alley." "Scared?"

"I'm not bragging I'm not. His keeping me out of his stable and out of his *Suwanee* is going to cramp my style. I'm not afraid of Consadine personally. I mean him—the guy. He's a pushover. But there's a lot of mugs—"

"I see." The eager, darting eyes sparkled; the crooked grin spread. "Chuck it, boy. Send me a bill tomorrow."

Donahue walked around the room scowling. He shrugged. "Hell, I might as well stick."

"Why? What's the use of inviting a bullet?"

"I'd hate my guts if I gave it the go-by now."

Karssen slapped him. "Boy, you've got what it takes!"

"Cut out the bouquets, Alex. Give me a drink."

"But remember"—Karssen pinched his arm, tightened down his voice—"you've got to keep my name out of this. Unless you get the real low-down. . . . What'll you have?"

"Anything that burns on the way down."

At 11:40 Donahue breezed into the *Hotel Whitestone*, where he kept a small bachelor apartment. Hinkley, an assistant editor of the *Sporting Sphere*, rose from a straight-backed chair in the lobby. A scrawny, young-old little man, dressed in flashy clothes, a low-crowned derby, he always affected an unpleasant leer that was, obviously, intended for a smile.

"Brother, can you spare a dime's worth o' your time?"

Donahue said: "Oh, I mistook you for one of the potted plants," and kept heading for the desk.

"Frequently potted but never 'a plant. Say, kiddo . . ." He lolled languidly after Donahue.



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Donahue received several letters from the clerk, turned, moved towards the elevator. Hinkley fell in beside him, rose in the car with him and paced him down the fifth floor corridor. All the time Donahue was reading a letter. Reaching his door, he unlocked it, entered his small apartment and turned on the lights. Hinkley, lolling in, kicked the door shut with his heel.

Donahue took off hat and overcoat, carried them into a closet, said from the closet: "Well, what's on your mind?"

Hinkley helped himself to a cigar. He nipped off the end, said nothing.

Donahue reappeared, saying: "Well, what's on your mind?"

"I was up the *Suwanee* tonight. Kelly McParad said you had an interview with Consadine."

"Did he say *interview*?"

"Call the italics mine."

Donahue went into the bathroom, washed his hands and reappeared carrying his tuxedo jacket over his arm.

"What about Consadine?" Hinkley drawled from the depths of a wing chair.

Donahue, sitting on the divan, removed his shoes, clamped in shoe-trees. He carried them into the bedroom, called out: "He likes me. He just wanted to shake my hand." He appeared in the doorway clad only in shorts.

"You better toddle, Hinkley." He disappeared again.

"The Sporting Sphere," Hinkley said, "is aching to pay you a little cash for a little good turn." There was a moment of silence, then Donahue came into the living-room buttoning his pajama coat, holding a pipe in his teeth. He crammed the pipe, lighted it while peering down keenly at the man in the wing chair. "About what?" he asked.

Hinkley sent up a toy balloon of cigar smoke. "You've been tagging Consadine's fights for the past three months, Donny. That's common gossip. When one of the best private dicks in the city—and one of the best known—does that sort of thing, it's news in the bud. Catch on?"

"No."

He puffed up. "Tell me some more."

"My sheet's interested. What have you got on Consadine?"

"What's it worth?"

"Anything within reason. We know you're not tagging his fights for the fun of it. Who's behind you? Who hired you?"

"That goes in the deal, huh?"

"Sure. We've got to know where we stand."

"What's your top price?"

"How about ten thousand?"

Donahue sat down and began chuckling, wagging his head. "This is rich," he said. "Rich!"

He stopped chuckling and his face began to darken. "That rag you work for, if it paid out ten thousand it'd go broke."

"Says you."

"Says I!"

"Why get tough?"

Donahue puffed, took the pipe from his mouth and sighted down the stem. "Hinkley, I'm so far ahead of you that it's a crime to take advantage of you. Listen, boy scout: I don't know a thing. I just follow the fights. I don't like bridge and I don't like jig-saw puzzles. So I follow the fights. Consadine's pugs put on some swell dances." He made a brusque gesture. "Okey, Hinky-dink; take the air." Hinkley stood up. "Listen, Donny—"

"Peddle it where you've got an audience." Rising, Donahue napped a hand. "I need some shut-eye. Skid out."

"Donny, look now . . ." He moistened his lips. "This is hot. Be a pal. The *Sporting Sphere*— Listen, kid; how about twelve thousand?" Donahue suddenly appeared thoughtful. "How about fifteen?"

"Maybe I could arrange it."

"Fifteen?"

"Okey, fifteen. But that's the limit."

Donahue laughed shortly. "Now scram. I just wanted to know how much you were holding out."

"But—"

## Six Deadly Dames

Donahue's voice snapped. "You deaf? Slide out!"

Hinkley colored. "That's a lousy trick, fella!"

Donahue took his arm, escorted him to the door. "Thanks for dropping around, Hinkley. You must come in again some time. Come in for a drink some time. Bring your own liquor."

"I hate wiseguys!"

"So do I——when they go flat." He opened the door. "And do you know why the Sporting *Sphere* can't bribe me?"

Hinkley made no reply,

"I'll tell you," Donahue said. "Because I happen to know ——and I'm one of the few guys who know it——I happen to know that Consadine dough is behind it. And I can guess—— don't break down, Hinkley——I can guess that it wasn't your editor who sent you here. Should I tell you now who sent you here?"

Hinkley rasped: "Things happen to guys like you!" He swung out, strode swiftly down the corridor.

Donahue called after him: "Consadine sent you, dope!"

## Six Deadly Dames

### IV

THE *HOTEL CHANCELLOR* lifted its pale, severe beauty into the cold winter starlight. Traffic moved sparsely on Park Avenue, slipping out of the ramp that hurtled Forty-second, Street and wound its way among the cluster of skyscrapers. The outward serenity of the *Hotel Chancellor* was massive, overwhelming.

In the lobby, shaped like a tremendous bell, deftly lighted by radiance that seemed to float beneath the high-domed ceiling, a page boy moved swiftly, vanished down one of many corridors. The chief hotel clerk spoke quickly into a telephone; he was hunched over the instrument, his eyes intent. The liveried doorman, who should have gone, off duty at twelve—it was ten past twelve—lingered beneath the heart-shaped marquee, blowing white breath into the cold, tamping cold heels on the sidewalk.

A man came out of a door in a corridor on the main floor. He was buttoning his vest. He had combed his hair quickly, and a slab of it, at the crown, sprouted upward like a recalcitrant weed. His face was puffed from sleep. He poked irritably at his sleep-drugged eyes, wheezed. He headed for the lobby, and gradually, as he walked, he straightened, squared his shoulders. He was Adolph Elms, the resident managing director.

Before he attained the lobby he ran into a short, rotund, bald man. Both men stopped, regarded each other. The bald man sighed, spread his palms. The managing director grunted irritably. Both men fell in step, reached the lobby, where they were joined by a third man who looked as if he had seen a ghost. The three men marched towards the elevator bank, vanished in a car.

The lobby door opened and two men headed across the lobby, paused at the desk. As they went towards the elevators, they were joined by several uniformed policemen. All entered an elevator and were whisked upward.

The lobby was vacant, then. Two drunks staggered in, singing. They wore top hats. They fell into an elevator car. A man came in with a lot of baggage, signed the register. The operator was telling room so-and-so that the hotel did not supply liquor.

Donahue entered swathed in a belted camel's-hair coat, his lean face riding beneath a brown felt. He was slapping pigskin gloves against his thigh as he reached the desk. "Where's the trouble?"

"I'm sorry. Press not allowed——"

"I'm not the Press. Sergeant McPard phoned me."

"Oh. It's 1406."

Donahue found a waiting car. It carried him silently to the fourteenth floor, and stepping out he swung his legs down a wide corridor that smelled remarkably of fresh air. He turned several corners, came to a door that had 1406 inscribed in bronze on its dark panel.

A cop opened the door, said: "What do you want?"

"Kelly called me."

He stepped into a spacious foyer. To his left was a Lancet arch. Beyond was a large, luxurious room, almost baronial in size; at the farther side was a narrow mezzanine. Many lights were sprinkled about. There was no glare, yet there was sufficient light. Bluecoats were standing about. Several hotel officials, jabbering. Kelly McPard, spic and span, working his provocative smile, his eyes wandering but his mind——Donahue knew——certainly at work.

"Thanks, Donny," McPard called.

Spengler, his assistant, came in through a French window. He had been wandering about on the broad terrace that overlooked Park Avenue and the East River. He was a roughneck, badly dressed, good-humored, loud, who regarded his job as a joyous hobby.

He yelled: "Hello, Irish!"

The hotel officials looked up in unison, a little shocked.

But Spengler was never self-conscious. He banged the windows shut with great gusto, smacked his big hands together.

"What do you think, Donny?" he bawled on good-naturedly. "Somebody give Giles Consadine the works. Ain't is just like life, though? There's a mugg with everything to live for——swell joint here——nice flower garden out front——"

## Six Deadly Dames

McPard broke in quietly: "Okey, Dutch."

Spengler was expansive: "Okey, Kel. Excuse it."

Kelly McPard beckoned to Donahue. They climbed to the mezzanine, and McPard pushed in a door that had been standing slightly ajar. He leaned in the doorway, jerked his chin.

"A honey, eh, Donny?" Donahue stood beside him, looked down at the body of Giles Consadine. It lay on the floor, in front of a huge canopied bed. Clad in gray silk pajamas, it lay on one side, head pillowed on arm.

McPard's voice was low, almost confidential: "Two slugs smack in the chest."

"Anybody hear the shots?"

"No. Radio was going loud."

"How'd they find out?"

"They knew he was in. He'd told the operator he was expecting a long-distance call from Chicago. When it came, she got no answer. She sent a hop up. He knocked hard. No answer. And he heard the radio playing. So he got a clerk with a pass key. Found him at exactly midnight. It was eleven when he came home."

"Between eleven and twelve, huh? Any ideas?"

McPard looked vacantly at the body on the floor, spoke in a detached manner: "Yeah. My first idea, I suppose, was to ask you over."

"What am I going to turn out to be now—a strange interlude?"

McPard rarely became angry, rarely raised his voice. "I guess you were one of the last men to see him alive. He never came down to the *Suwanee*. Took the Arena service entrance out and went straight to his hotel."

"How do you know?"

"That elevator boy at the Arena saw him leave at 10:45. It'd take about fifteen minutes, traveling fast."

"He come in alone?"

McPard nodded. "The clerk said . . . Look here, Donny. Consadine wanted to see you earlier tonight. Pretty bad. Or he'd not have paged you, in the bar. What did he want?"

"Wanted to know if I'd won any dough on the fight."

McPard chuckled faintly. "Quit kidding."

"All right; you tell me what he wanted."

McPard fooled with a button on Donahue's overcoat. "He hired you for something, didn't he?"

Donahue walked six paces away, turned, laughed and wagged his head. "That sure panics me!"

McPard grinned, showing small pearly teeth. His eyes twinkled, radiated. You could never tell what was going on behind that smiling, cherubic face. Kelly McPard should have been an actor; he had all the qualifications.

"Honest, Donny, I've got to know."

Donahue came back to face McPard and said, seriously: "Consadine couldn't have hired me for a million."

"That sounds nice and big and strong, kid, but I'd hate to 've had him wave the million in front of your face."

Donahue smiled, shrugged. "All right, Kel; I exaggerated. But get this: he didn't hire me."

"Was he scared?"

"I didn't ask him."

McPard sighed. "What a pal!" Then he was suddenly grave, his voice low and quiet: "I've got to know, Donny."

"I told you."

"Listen, kid." He touched Donahue's arm. "You know the champ—you know Danny Harrigan. . . I used to, well—you know, I kind of brought him up. In a way, I mean. I mean when he was a kid I used to steer him clear of the hoodlums. When I was a roundsman. Once I let him have his picture taken wearing my hat and shield. . . Listen, kid; this is no song and dance, no soft soap. Listen, Donny"—his voice dropped lower—"the champ was here tonight."

"Go on."

"He was here. The kid runs the hotel elevator—he—couldn't help recognizing him. Danny was here. Came here between—eleven and half—past—nearer half—past. Came out again in about ten minutes." He withdrew his hand from his overcoat pocket. A 32-calibre revolver lay in his palm. "Danny's gun."

"How do you know?"

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“I helped him get a license to carry it—six months ago, when he had an idea some muggs were trying to kidnap . him. See the chip on the butt? . . . Danny's gun.”

Donahue was silent for a moment, eyeing McPard steadily. Then he said: “What am I supposed to do? If it's Harrigan's gun, what's the matter with getting Harrigan?”

“I phoned his hotel. He checked out at 11:15. He must have taken his bags and checked them at the station. Then he came here.”

“Where is he now?”

“I don't know whether I'd like to know or not—but I don't know. I want to know if Consadine hired you. I want to know if he was afraid of Harrigan—or anybody else.”

Donahue said: “Consadine didn't hire me.”

“Did he try to?”

“No.”

McPard sighed. “I'm not going to like it—pinching that kid.”

“Hey, Kel,” Spengler shouted. “The camera guy from H.Q. is here. He wants to mug the stiff. Ask the stiff if it's okey.”

Donahue said to McPard: “I imagine Spengler's comedy goes over big with the hotel help.”

“Spengler's all right at heart. . . . Listen, Donny——”

Donahue held up his palms. “Nix, Kel. We've been all over that. Consadine didn't hire me.”

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### V

DONAHUE walked north. Park Avenue was wide, empty, in the winter starlight. Even in the dark its smartness was obvious, insistent. The purr of a passing automobile's tires made a loud sound in the wide, windowed canyon.

Donahue cut east to Lexington Avenue, entered a drugstore and pushed into a telephone booth. He thumbed a directory, dialed a number, made a whistling mouth but no sound. The operator at the *Hotel Eden* answered and Donahue said:

"I want to speak to Miss Moore in apartment 44."

"We have no Miss Moore in apartment 44."

"You must have. Look it up."

There was a pause and then the operator said: "I'm sorry, sir; we have no Miss Moore in apartment 44. The only Moore we have is in apartment 606."

"I must have made a mistake." Donahue said. "Pardon me."

He hung up, whistled his way out of the booth and bought a malted milk at the counter. He drank only half of it, left the drug-store and walked north on Lexington, then west to Fifth. In a nearby side-street he entered the small, chic *Hotel Eden*, crossed to the open elevator car and mentioned the sixth floor. The operator yawned on the way up.

Donahue hummed on his way down the sixth floor corridor, bowed before 606, listening, and then rippled his knuckles down the panel. He seemed quite satisfied with himself, teetering back and forth from heel to toe.

A breathless voice broke on the other side of the door:

"Who's there?"

"Is Harrigan in there?"

"No!"

"I don't believe it."

"He's not here!"

"I heard him in there."

"You didn't! Who are you?"

"A detective. Harrigan's in there."

"He isn't!"

"You've got to prove it."

A lock grated. The door was flung open. Token Moore was not so sleek as she had been at the fight; but she was no less beautiful. She looked stunning in a black sheer peignoir, black pajamas beneath. She was flushed, her auburn hair ruffled, and her eyes bloodshot. And she was drunk.

Donahue shouldered in, shouldered the door shut and snapped the lock. He passed her where she stood swaying, went into the living-room, the bedroom, the bathroom, the closets. He reappeared to find Token flip-flopping her way across to a divan. She made a peculiarly pathetic spectacle. Changing her mind about the divan, she brought up in the center of the floor, rubber-kneed, dabbing at loose ends of hair.

"What you want?"

She hadn't a bad voice; there was nothing particularly coarse about it; but liquor made her tongue thick, her lips clumsy. She bounced from one foot to the other, her arms darting out at eccentric angles in an effort to strike a balance.

Donahue said: "Where's Harrigan?"

"Don't know."

She made a headlong dive for the coffee table, grabbed at a bottle of gin, raised the bottle to her lips. She had had more than enough. Donahue knew it. But he didn't move, he didn't offer advice. She gagged and slammed the bottle down and went dizzily around the room holding her throat. He seemed keenly, clinically interested in her haywire maneuvers. Suddenly she wound up in a heap, on the divan, and lay there shaking violently, panting hoarsely.

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Donahue sauntered over, sat down beside her, ran his big hand familiarly through her hair.

“Little girl shouldn't drink gin that way——!”

She slapped at his arm and went spinning to the floor.

He sighed. “The things I walk into.” He picked her up and stood holding her in his arms. She was small, pliable, and he liked the feel of her in his arms. He sighed again. “Business, though, is business,” he remarked as he dropped her to the divan.

She crouched there, staring up at him out of wide-open eyes. He rubbed the back of his neck. He sat down beside her and she shrank back farther, tugging her peignoir across her small breasts.

“Listen,” he said. “What kind of a deal was made on that fight? You're in the know. You'd know. Was Harrigan supposed to lose that fight or what? What went wrong?”

She gave an agonized groan, sprang from the divan and went hurtling across the room. She carried down a tea-table, sprawled with it, her legs flying.

Donahue said: “Tsk, tsk!”

She scrambled up and ran crazily into the bedroom. He followed her. He found her hiding beneath the bed. Pulling her out by one leg, he lifted her to her feet, held her erect. She looked horror-stricken.

He shook her. “Pull yourself together.”

Her teeth began chattering and her face became so white that Donahue was uneasy. He was annoyed, irritated. He laid her on the bed and she buried her face in a pillow and began sobbing and moaning.

He thought she might be out of her mind.

He went into the living-room and walked round and round, angry one moment, puzzled the next. Her moaning was unpleasant to hear. He was standing in the middle of the room, cogitating, when she came stealthily out of the bedroom and crept across the living-room. Fascinated, he watched her. She appeared to be unaware of his presence and kept creeping towards the hall door. Finally he jumped, caught her as she was about to open the door. Her voice was hoarse: “Lemme out!”

“Listen——”

“Lemme——” She tussled, kicked, clawed in sudden fury. '

“Now, Token, take it easy!” She tore away from him, fell on the doorknob, managed to unlock the catch. But he grabbed her by the arms, lifted her, swung her about and whisked her across the living-room, into the bedroom. Her feet did not once touch the floor. He dropped her to the bed, his shirt cuffs protruding, his hair rumpled and several bloody scratches on his face. He rasped: “Cut out this damned nonsense!” She tried to heave off the bed, but he caught her, flattened her on the bed, held her down.

“Listen,” he said earnestly, “I'm not going to hurt you. See? You understand? I want to know what happened to Consadine. I want to know where Harrigan is. I want to know if that fight was framed. I want—— Wait a minute. Stay here. Stay on this bed. I want to lock that door.”

He rose, swung into the living-room. He stopped short. Two men were coming across it towards him and both had guns leveled. They were young men, impeccably dressed. One was tall, handsome and hard in a pale-faced, red-lipped way. The other was small, anaemic, and the .45 automatic he held looked huge in his skinny little hand. They were bent on business.

“Back up, you,” the tall man said.

“Wait a second——”

“Back up!”

The two men crowded Donahue, and he backed into the bedroom. The smaller of the two had a nervous affliction; his upper lip kept twitching while the rest of his face remained cold, stony. His eyes were as cold as a lizard's.

The tall man snapped: “There she is!” He leaped after Token Moore as she staggered towards the bathroom.

The small man kept Donahue covered. The tall man, rough-housing Token across the room, said: “Where's Harrigan, brat?”

“Oh, my——!” she moaned.

“Where's Harrigan?”

“I——I don't know.”

He held her up with his left hand. With his right he slapped her face. She choked and groaned and he backed

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her up, slapping her hard, first on one cheek, then on the other. Meanwhile he wore a hard, tight smile. He stopped slapping her, took hold of her left arm and bent it behind her back. She grimaced. Her eyeballs bulged, rolled, showed the whites as she bent backward. Her knees gave way and she slumped. He let her fall to the floor.

Donahue offered: "She's just drunk."

The tall man spun on him. "You're Donahue," he rasped.

"Okey."

The tall man took one step, one swing. Donahue crashed against the wall. His eyes blazed.

"What the hell's the idea of that?" he exploded.

"For being funny," the tall man said.

The little' man grinned with his twitching lip, but the gun he held did not waver.

The tall man went into the bathroom, came out with a glass of water which he threw in Token's face. She stirred and he hauled her to her feet, shook her.

"Where's Harrigan?"

"Please——" Tears began to stream from her eyes.

He said: "Stop yammering, brat! Where is he?"

"Please——honest——so help me——"

He scoffed: "Crap!" The hard flat of his hand whanged against her face. Furious, but coldly so, he pitched her to the bed. As she tried to crawl off, he walked around the foot of the bed, waited a second, then struck her full in the face. She toppled back to the other side of the bed, fell to the floor, groaning weakly.

The little man giggled. "Jeeze, she's frail, the dame!"

Donahue said: "In about a minute I'm going to get sore."

"In about a minute," the tall man said, "you'll *be* sore—— all over."

"What's the sense of slamming her around that way? Any punk can do that."

The tall man pointed. "You got yours coming, bozo! So keep your trap shut!"

"What have I done? Hell, I'm looking for Harrigan, too."

The tall man narrowed his eyes. "What for?"

"Murder of a guy named Consadine?"

The tall man and the small man flicked a glance at each other. Then the tall man said: "What's she told you?"

"Not a damned thing. She's pie-eyed. I couldn't raise a peep out of her. Harrigan's vanished."

"Who says so? Who says Harrigan murdered Consadine?"

"The cops. Kelly McPard found Harrigan's gun in Consadine's apartment——the gun that killed Consadine. It's open and shut. The cops'll have him inside of twenty-four hours, and it's a murder rap."

The tall man quieted down. He said: "Is this straight?"

"Phone Kelly McPard and check up."

The tall man looked sharply at Donahue, at the little man. He turned and walked to the other side of the bed, stood there looking downward. Token was on the floor and Donahue, from where he stood, could not see her. Several times the tall man raised quizzical eyes, nicked them at Donahue. Then he leaned down, picked up the girl and flopped her on the bed. She lay sacklike, unconscious. The tall man slapped her cheeks briskly, not roughly, in an attempt to bring her around. But she remained unconscious. He cursed, shrugged. He blew his nose sharply. There were diamonds on his hands. His clothes looked expensive. He blew his nose again, looked from the girl to Donahue, frowned, went through the apartment like a dog on a scent. Presently he stopped in front of Donahue and frowned seriously.

"We're breezing," he said. "You're walking down and out with us. Get your hat. . . . Watch him, Midge," he added to the small man.

Donahue went into the living-room, scooped up his hat. The small man played shadow to every move. The tall man joined them and they went out into the corridor.

The tall man said: "We'll walk down a couple of floors, then take the elevator. Act nice, Donahue."

Donahue looked at their bulging pockets, said: "Wouldn't you, in my place?" The tall man was not in a jocular mood. "Pass up the cracks." Three floors below, they buzzed for an elevator. The ear dropped them smoothly to the lobby. The lobby was deserted except for the clerk at the desk. He looked up, saw them, looked down again and kept on writing in a ledger. They went out, walked as far as Madison Avenue. On the corner the tall man



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stopped.

He said: "Okey, Donahue; keep going. Fade." It— was cold and deserted on the corner, and he looked at their white, humorless faces, their bulging pockets. A lump caught in his throat. He looked up and down the avenue. No one was in sight. He returned his gaze to the motionless white faces.

The tall man said: "Well, get going——west."

He nodded. He turned on his heel and started across the avenue. His jaw was clamped) his shoulders hunched a bit. He went through all the imagined sensations of a man being shot in the back. He didn't dare look around but walked on——not too rapidly; though he had to grit his teeth, almost, to stop from breaking into a run.

But nothing happened. He reached the next corner, stopped, looked around. He was in a cold sweat.

He became suddenly angry. He could feel heat rushing through his body and in an instant he was striding back through the street. He broke into a run, up on his toes, the long skirt of his overcoat flapping about his knees. Reaching Madison, he peered south. Several blocks distant, two men passed beneath a street light. But Donahue wasn't sure. He was angry enough, however, to take a chance.

He flagged a loafing southbound taxi and climbing in told the driver to take it easy. He drove four blocks south, called for a right turn, passed the driver a coin and jumped off.

From the shadow of a stone stoop he saw the tall man and the small man stride past the corner, heading south on Madison.

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### VI

KELLY McPARD sat on a desk in his office. The office was warm, and the sound of steam whistling from a radiator was not unpleasant. Spengler, his assistant, leaned against the wall; he looked wide awake and kept jabbing industriously at his teeth with a shaved-down match. Kelly looked preoccupied.

Harrigan, the champ, sat in an armchair and scowled at the floor. Out of fighting togs, he was less prepossessing. He had a good face, far from handsome, and coarse-featured; but he gave the general impression of being clean-cut, honest, straightforward; a fine animal at the peak of his power, aware of his standing, a little obstinate.

When Donahue came in, McPard looked up, twiddled his thumbs, said absently: "Hello, Donny."

"Jeeze, you still up!" bawled out Spengler. "Hey, look, we got Harrigan here!"

Donahue closed the door, leaned against it. The brown of his lean and chiseled face was ruddied by the cold. His coat belt was yanked tight, the loose end dangling. He looked at Harrigan, who scowled; at Kelly, whose face was steeped in thought.

"Quick work," he said.

"Ah, say," Spengler said, flapping a big hand, "it was a snap, it was. He just went to another hotel."

Kelly McPard said: "The champ says he didn't do it!" Harrigan's jaw jutted. "Of course I didn't do it!"

"An old refrain," Donahue remarked. "What?" the champ barked.

"I was just thinking," Donahue said; and to McPard:

"Who did it, Kel?"

McPard said: "The circumstances say Danny did it."

Harrigan heaved up, his thick brows bending. "That there's a lie, Kelly!" He spun on Donahue. "What the hell are you butting in for? You keep your mug out of it!"

Donahue, leaning against the door, said: "Don't shoot your mouth off at me, Harrigan. You're a nice guy and a real champ, but don't get tough."

"Now, now," McPard chimed in. "None o' that. ... Donny, he said he went there, all right. He went to Consadine's apartment. He had an idea Consadine had his girl there. He had an idea the jane and Consadine were cutting corners on him. He was all steamed up and he went there with a gun. But he didn't find the girl. Consadine was scared about Danny holding the gun and he kept talking to him and after a while Danny threw the gun on a sofa. Danny was all shaken up. Consadine wanted him to have a drink, but Danny was too balled up to enjoy a drink, so he just turned around and went out, leaving his gun there.

McPard paused, then added: "That's Danny's story."

Harrigan blurted: "It's the truth!"

McPard shrugged, strolled around the office. There were no melodramatics about Kelly McPard, but you could see he was deeply disturbed, indecisive, caught in a web of duty and sentiment.

Harrigan's face worked. "That's what I did! That's why I polished Tripp off in the fourth tonight. I could have done it in the second—but I was making up my mind!"

Donahue's eyes steadied. "Why?"

"Why?" Harrigan roared, swinging around. "Because I was sure Consadine was taking my girl away from me. No guy can take a jane away from me!" Some of his self-assurance fled and his shoulders hunched, his big face looked pained, his eyes wandered. "I didn't kill him. I guess I went there to do it. If she'd been there, I guess I would have done it."

Donahue felt his way cautiously. "You did a nice job on Tripp."

"Sure. Tripp's okey, but I can lick him. Maybe I did surprise him a bit. I guess I surprised him a hell of a lot!"

"I see. You were to let him stay the fifteen, huh?"

"Stay!" Harrigan laughed. "The tramp was supposed to win!"

Donahue, tingling all over, merely said: "H'm."

"I was supposed to lay down in the twelfth! But I seen my girl down there with Consadine and I went nuts. I couldn't stand it. I was afraid it was a trick. I was afraid that if I lost the fight I'd never get another come-back

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chance. Consadine promised me a fight in six months when I was supposed to flatten Tripp. But I was scared. I was scared he was framing me and trying to get Token. I went nuts. I was afraid if I wasn't champ she wouldn't like me any more."

Donahue suddenly felt sorry for Harrigan. The champ was just a kid with the mind of a kid. There was something touching in the way his voice broke hoarsely, in the way his face muscles strained and his eyes darted about, harried and uncertain. A splendid machine in the ring; outside, a babe in arms, a sap. "If I wasn't champ she wouldn't like me any more."

Donahue said: "What are you going to do, Kel?"

"Hell, I guess I've got to chuck him in the hold-over."

"I didn't do it!" Harrigan cried hoarsely. "I tell you I didn't do it, Kel! I meant to do it, but I didn't, Token wasn't there and I didn't do it. And then I felt like a louse and I didn't have the guts to go back and see her! I felt like a louse!"

Donahue became engrossed in his own thoughts. His train of thought went into reverse, traveled backward over the ground he had covered. Presently he said:

"You going home, Kel?"

"I was thinking of it."

"Hang around, will you?"

"Why?"

"I may need you."

McPard squinted. "What's on your mind?"

"Something goofy as hell." He opened the door. "Hang around, will you?"

"Sure, I'll hang around."

VII

DONAHUE was surprised, anxious, when he found the door of Token Moore's apartment unlocked. Entering, he closed it quietly, locked it. He made his way towards the bedroom, reached the doorway.

She lay on the bed, sprawled. It seemed to him that she lay exactly as she had lain when he and the two men had walked out. Drawing nearer, he could see that she was breathing. This reassured him. She was sleeping, soundly. There were marks on her face put there by the tall man. Her sheer garments were torn in places and there was a bruise on her shoulder, another on one wrist. Obviously she had not left the bed.

He sat on the bed and began shaking her shoulder. She roused slowly, turned over, away from him, sighed deeply. He kept shaking her and presently she turned back again, opened her eyes quite candidly. In an instant a rush of memory must have come over her, for her eyes widened, her brows shot upward.

Donahue said: "Take it easy. You're okey. Those guys went away. Now take it easy. Do you want a drink of water?" He saw that she was moistening her dry lips. He rose. "I'll get you a drink of water."

He brought a tumbler full from the bathroom. She was sitting up, white-faced, quivering now but giving no hint of being hysterical. He sat down on the edge of the bed, held the glass to her lips. As she drank, her eyes regarded him steadily. Finished, she looked away. Donahue set the glass on the bed-table. He did not say anything for a while, choosing to allow a few minutes for her to compose herself. He didn't say anything when she rose, went to a mirror and looked at herself. He heard a gasp. Then for a moment she seemed stricken, as if remembering. He went over and offered a cigarette. She made a face, shook her head.

"Too much hangover, huh?" he muttered casually.

She let herself down on to the chair in front of the dresser. Donahue dragged over another chair, sat down beside her. Instead of looking directly at her, he studied her image in the mirror.

He said in a conversational undertone: "They've got Harrigan for the murder of Giles Consadine."

She looked up quickly, at her own image, at Donahue's. Her eyes remained round, wide. Then she turned her head and looked at Donahue. He regarded her image, noticing that she had a nice profile. "What?" she said. "Harrigan."

"No!"

"Would I kid you, Token?"

His voice remained low, conversational, almost intimate. She looked back at the mirrored images. The fact that she was able to see the change in her own features, startled her.

He said to her image: "I dropped around again, Token, to tell you. Harrigan hasn't got a chance in the world. The cops found his gun—fired twice—in Consadine's apartment. He admits having been there but he says he didn't kill Consadine. He says he left the gun there." She shook her head. "No-no! He didn't kill Giles!"

"I thought you might know."

"Know?"

"Know he didn't."

Her eyes shimmered as she stared at his image. "I mean—I mean I believe him! He couldn't have—"

"He could have," Donahue said pleasantly. "He meant to, in fact. He went there with a gun, expecting to find you with Consadine. He didn't find you there."

"No—of course not," she panted.

"Were you there?"

"No!"

He sighed, was silent for a moment. Then he said: "You and Consadine were crossing corners with the kid, weren't you?"

In an instant she was on her feet, quivering. "That's a damned lie!"

He rose and leaned back on his heels, dropped his chin, regarded her sorrowfully. "You were true-blue to the kid, huh?"

"Yes!"

"Didn't Consadine try to make you forget him?" She stuttered: "It—it w—wasn't my fault."

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“He did, didn't he?” After a moment she said: “Yes.”

“You hated him?”

“I—well, I couldn't show it—account of Danny. He was Danny's boss more or less.”

“Did you know Harrigan was to throw the fight—and didn't?”

She looked startled, confused; but she managed to say: “I thought something went wrong. I didn't know just what it was.”

“Harrigan was supposed to lay down in the twelfth. He didn't. He didn't because he thought you and Consadine were cheating him. He was afraid that if he lost the championship he'd lose you. Token, you were cheating on the kid.”

She shook all over. “I was not! I didn't! Danny meant everything in the world to me! I love him!”

Donahue was mournful. “He's sure in a tough spot right now, Token. It's murder. Say the word over to yourself a lot of times and get the real sting of it.”

She gripped his arm. “N-no! He didn't! They can't prove he did! He says he didn't! How can they prove he did? Oh, he didn't kill Consadine!”

“He's got” to prove he didn't. Or somebody else has to prove it for him. . . . How about yourself, Token?”

She choked out: “Me?”

He was eyeing her keenly. “When I first came in here you were practically out of your mind. You were raving drunk. You were going around this apartment like a madwoman. You were mad. Off your nut. You hardly heard me and you hardly saw me. You were crazy, deranged—horrified about something. I couldn't talk you out of it.”

She shrank back from him.

He went on: “You knew Consadine was dead. You knew he was dead and if you'd been in this apartment since you I left the Arena you wouldn't have known that he was dead. Because nobody knew. Not even the Press. You couldn't have found it out from Harrigan because he didn't see you or phone. Besides, he didn't know Consadine was dead. He . didn't know till the cops nabbed him. Yet you knew. When I got here, Token, *you knew that Consadine was dead!*”

“No!” she screamed, fleeing to the other side of the room.

He did not move to follow, but he lifted his arm, wagged his forefinger. “You knew! You were trying to drug yourself with liquor. *You were in Consadine's apartment when he was killed!*”

She choked and shook her head violently. She backed up against the wall, spreading her arms, spreading her hands against the wall. Words deserted her and she could only choke, gasp, grimace.

Donahue was asking gently: “Did you kill Consadine, Token?”

She groaned “O-o-oh!” miserably and slid down the wall, her eyes rolling upward, showing the whites.

Donahue crossed the room, knelt down in front of her. She sat in a crushed, broken huddle, tears streaming down her cheeks. He took hold of her chin, raised her face.

“Come on, Token,” he said. “Who killed Consadine?”

VIII

IN A STREET off Lexington Avenue, in the Thirties, Donahue went along counting brownstone houses. It was too dark to read the numbers. At three in the morning the city was deserted. The swift passage of a taxicab could be heard blocks away. A cough echoed, and you were aware of your footsteps. Earlier, Donahue had come down this street, trailing the tall man and the small man from Madison Avenue. He had counted houses then, oriented himself pretty thoroughly.

He entered a vestibule, found the inner door locked and tried several skeleton keys. None worked. The lock was old but good. He tried again and again, working as quietly as possible, but with no success. He knew the house contained furnished rooms, apartments, and he had an idea as to what apartment he wanted. After the two men had entered earlier, he had seen a light appear in a front window, second story, where no light had been before. There was, now, a hint of light in the same window—behind drawn dark blinds. He was almost certain he heard a radio playing.

After a few minutes he gave up the hall door and soft-shoed down the stoop to the sidewalk. There was a shallow areaway belonging to the house, three steps below the sidewalk. Unlike the main floor door—which was equipped with a snap lock—the door in the areaway had only a keyhole beneath the knob. Donahue got in, locked the door from the inside.

He was in a hallway. Groping through the dark, he came to a boxed-in narrow stairway and climbed to the main floor, where a dim light glowed in the hallway. He listened for a moment, heard no sound; and then he began climbing the carpeted stairway towards the second floor. A radio was playing, softly. He tracked down the sound to the front of the hallway, heard the low mutter of voices behind a door on the left.

Standing motionless for a long moment, listening, cogitating, he finally drew his gun from its shoulder-holster. It was a .38 revolver, and he cocked it. Then he cat-footed halfway up the next stairway, turned, and made considerable noise coming down. He went directly to the door and knocked insistently.

A voice asked: "What's the matter? Who's it?"

Donahue assumed a high, petulant, rasping voice: "You going to play that damned radio all night? How do you expect a person to sleep?"

"Okey, okey."

"If you don't cut it out I'll find a way to make you! Who do you think you are, anyhow? You think maybe you own this house? Other tenants want to sleep! I want to sleep!"

"I said okey, didn't I?"

"I'm just getting tired of it! You play it again and I'll bust your door down and bust the radio, too!"

"Oh, yeah!"

"You heard me!"

There was an oath, a furious rattling of the key in the lock. The door whipped open.

Donahue went in like a gale wind. Briefly he saw the little man before him. The little man went down like a struck weed. The tall man was sitting in a big armchair with a girl on his lap. That handicapped him. He dropped a glass of whiskey and the girl, frightened, threw her arms around his neck. The little man began scuttling across the floor like a whipped cur, but at the same time he clawed frantically at a shoulder-holster. Another girl stopped squirting seltzer into a glass, opened her mouth wide but didn't say anything; her mouth remained open.

"You on the floor!" Donahue snapped.

The little man flattened, his right arm buried beneath his body. He remained that way, motionless, his breath whistling. The girl who had been squirting the seltzer began backing up, wooden-legged.

Donahue said: "You on the floor, slide that rod out from beneath you and be careful when you do it."

The tall man rose, lifting the girl with him. He set her down in the chair. He was in shirt-sleeves. His coat hung on the back of a chair several feet away; on the chair, also, hung his gun and holster. He put his hands on his hips. The diamonds on his fingers sparkled. The room was large, luxurious; a door, open, led to other rooms beyond.

"Is my face red?" he drawled.

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Donahue said: "It looks pretty white to me." He barked at the man on the floor: "What did I tell you about that gun!"

The little man's hand shot out, still holding the gun.

"Take your hand off it," Donahue said, "and crawl."

The little man was reluctant. Donahue took a step, put his foot down on the man's hand. There was a yelp. The little man crawled away. Donahue picked up the gun, hefted it, shoved it into his overcoat pocket.

"Get up now."

The little man rose, crouching. His upper lip twitched madly, his lower hung motionless, and the rest of his face was cold, stony, gray.

Donahue said to both men: "This is a pinch, sweethearts. . . . Half-pint, get over alongside your pal. Get over, I said!"

When the little man had joined his companion, Donahue moved to a small table, reached for a French telephone.

The girl who had been sitting on the tall man's lap cried: "What are you doing?"

"Cops."

"No! No! Listen, I can't be caught here! Listen, I got a husband! He'll beat hell out of me!" She jumped up, wild-eyed. "Listen, for— sake! Irene and I are supposed to be in New Jersey!"

Donahue said: "So I hope he beats hell out of you."

"Oh, please Oh, listen! N—no!" She stumbled across the room towards him, shaking her head. "You don't know Bill! He'll murder me! Irene and I are supposed to be in Bill's cabin near Woodport! Bill couldn't come account of work! He'll—"

"Get back!"

"Oh, won't you listen! My—! the cops! I can't—"

*"Get back! Don't get in my way!"*

Panicky, breathless, she swayed before him, wringing her hands.

He saw the little man move—lightning-fast—towards the chair on which the other's holster hung. He saw the woman reeling in front of him—her contorted face, her frizzy hair. He struck with his left hand and she reeled, took a floor lamp down with her, screamed. He saw the slight twitch of the holster as the little man freed the gun. Saw the gun swing.

Donahue fired twice. The two explosions interlocked, welded; there was only a split-instant's interval between them. There was no third report. The little man shook, sank—and Donahue saw that his eyes were closed tightly, that his upper lip convulsed, baring his teeth in a macabre grimace that almost looked like a grin. The tall man's face was white as death.

Donahue said to the tall man, grimly: "Ambitious, wasn't he?"

Then he raised the telephone.

IX

TOKEN MOORE sat in Kelly McPard's chair. She looked very lovely and grave and injured, with her downcast eyes, her fingers worrying a crumpled little handkerchief. Donahue, taking drafts from a bucket of hot coffee, regarded her critically. Kelly McPard, though he hadn't slept for many hours, looked spic and span, alert, wide-awake. There was a sound in the hall, and then the door opened and Spengler, grinning, shoved the tall man into the office. Spengler said: "He's Joe Ackerman. The little guy's Midge Reider. Close friends of King Padden, the St. Louis number one man."

Kelly McPard looked at Token Moore. "This the guy?"

She raised her eyes, then lowered them. "Yes." McPard sighed. "Okey, Dutch; take him out. Spengler shoved Ackerman into the hall, closed the door. Token had remained stoical too long. She burst out: "I'll go crazy, I'll go crazy!"

"You should have reported this," McPard said. "It would have saved a lot of grief."

She cried: "I couldn't! I was there when Danny came and I hid. I hid behind the sofa. And then Danny went out and about five minutes later there was a knock and I thought it was Danny again, so I hid behind the sofa again. I heard them come in. I heard one of them say: 'Consadine, you and Harrigan double-crossed the chief. King sent us here with three hundred grand to bet on Tripp because you told him you and Harrigan were chucking the fight. You double-crossed us, you rat. We're getting you and we're getting Harrigan.' And then—it happened. And I got a look at them. And then they went out and I saw Giles—dead—bloody—and I ran out and went home to my hotel."

"When you knew we had Harrigan here for the murder, why didn't you tell us the truth?"

She gasped: "I—I—" And then she broke into sobbing, covering her face.

Donahue set down the bucket of coffee. "I'll tell you, Kel," he said, his eyes still fixed on Token. "She and Consadine *had* been two-timing on the kid. When Consadine was knocked off, she skimmed out because she couldn't take it. When she learned from me, later, that you guys had Harrigan, she knew then that he was out of danger of the two men that had killed Consadine. So she told me she loved Danny. She must have had an idea that somehow or other Danny would be freed. With Consadine dead, she thought of Danny again—and his dough. If she'd come out in the open to explain who'd killed Consadine, Harrigan would have known she was in Consadine's place. So she kept silent. She probably had a vision of herself standing heroically by Danny during the trial—getting her mug in the papers, getting nice sobby write-ups, and getting—if he was freed—her hooks into his dough. She—"

Token screamed: "Stop! Oh, how I hate you—hate you! I—I—" She choked, then broke out in a flood of new tears, stamping her feet.

Donahue picked up the bucket of coffee again. He said, with a dry smile: "Dumb as the kid is, he fooled you and he fooled Consadine. Mainly, though, he fooled you. He'll have a hard time of it for a while, but he'll grow older, forget; and after a while you'll be just another day wasted away."

She buried her face in her hands. She was overwhelmed by chagrin, humiliation, self-pity.

"Save 'em," Donahue said. "Save your tears, Token."

THE END