

\$106,000 Blood Money

by Dashiell Hammett, 1894-1961

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“I’m Tom-Tom Carey,” he said, drawling the words.

I nodded at the chair beside my desk and weighed him in while he moved to it. Tall, wide-shouldered, thick-chested, thin-bellied, he would add up to say a hundred and ninety pounds. His swarthy face was hard as a fist, but there was nothing ill-humored in it. It was the face of a man of forty-something who lived life raw and thrived on it. His blue clothes were good and he wore them well.

In the chair he twisted brown paper around a charge of Bull Durham and finished introducing himself, “I’m Paddy the Mex’s brother.”

I thought maybe he was telling the truth. Paddy had been like this fellow in coloring and manner.

“That would make your real name Carrera,” I suggested.

“Yes.” He was lighting a cigarette. “Alfredo Estanislao Cristobal Carrera, if you want all the details.”

I asked him how to spell Estanislao, wrote the name down on a slip of paper, adding alias Tom-Tom Carey, rang for Tommy Howd, and told him to have the file clerk see if we had anything on it.

"While your people are opening graves I'll tell you why I'm here," the swarthy man drawled through smoke when Tommy had gone away with the paper.

"Tough, Paddy being knocked off like that," I said.

"He was too damned trusting to live long," his brother explained. "This is the kind of hombre he was—the last time I saw him was four years ago, here in San Francisco. I'd come in from an expedition down to—never mind where. Anyway I was flat. Instead of pearls all I'd got out of the trip was a bullet-crease over my hip. Paddy was dirty with fifteen thousand or so he'd just nicked somebody for. The afternoon I saw him he had a date that he was leery of toting so much money. So he gives me the fifteen thousand to hold for him till that night."

Tom-Tom Carey blew out smoke and smiled softly past me at a memory.

"That's the kind of hombre he was," he went on. "He'd trust even his own brother. I went to Sacramento that afternoon and caught a train east. A girl in Pittsburgh helped me spend the fifteen thousand. Her name was Laurel. She liked rye whiskey with milk for a chaser. I used to drink it with her till I was all curdled inside, and I've never had any appetite for *schmierkäse* since. So there's a hundred thousand dollars reward on this Papadopoulos, is there?"

"And six. The insurance companies put up a hundred thousand, the bankers' association five, and the city a thousand."

Tom-Tom Carey chucked the remains of his cigarette in the cuspidor and began to assemble another one.

"Suppose I hand him to you?" he asked. "How many ways will the money have to go?"

"None of it will stop here," I assured him. "The Continental Detective Agency doesn't touch reward money—and won't let its hired men. If any of the police are in on the pinch, they'll want a share."

"But if they aren't, it's all mine?"

"If you turn him in without help, or without any help except ours."

"I'll do that." The words were casual. "So much for the arrest. Now for the conviction part. If you get him, are you sure you can nail him to the cross?"

"I ought to be, but he'll have to go up against a jury—and that means anything can happen."

The muscular brown hand holding the brown cigarette made a careless gesture.

"Then maybe I'd better get a confession out of him before I drag him in," he said offhand.

"It would be safer that way," I agreed. "You ought to let that holster down an inch or two. It brings the gun butt too high. The bulge shows when you sit down."

"Uh-huh. You mean the one on the left shoulder. I took it away from a fellow after I lost mine. Strap's too short. I'll get another one this afternoon."

Tommy came in with a folder labeled, Carey, Tom-Tom, 1361-C. It held some newspaper clippings, the oldest dated ten years back, the youngest eight months. I read them through, passing each one to the swarthy man as I finished it. Tom-Tom Carey was written down in them as soldier of fortune, gunrunner, seal

poacher, smuggler, and pirate. But it was all alleged, supposed and suspected. He had been captured variously but never convicted of anything.

"They don't treat me right," he complained placidly when we were through reading. "For instance stealing that Chinese gunboat wasn't my fault. I was forced to do it—I was the one that was double-crossed. After they'd got the stuff aboard they wouldn't pay for it. I couldn't unload it. I couldn't do anything but take gunboat and all. The insurance companies must want this Papadopoulos plenty to hang a hundred thousand on him."

"Cheap enough if it lands him," I said. "Maybe he's not all the newspapers picture him as, but he's more than a handful. He gathered a whole damned army of strong-arm men here, took over a block in the center of the financial district, looted the two biggest banks in the city, fought off the whole police department, made his getaway, ditched the army, used some of his lieutenants to bump off some more of them—that's where your brother Paddy got his—then with the help of Pogy Reeve, Big Flora Brace and Red O'Leary, wiped out the rest of his lieutenants. And remember, these lieutenants weren't schoolboys—they were slick grifters like Bluepoint Vance and the Shivering Kid and Darby M'Laughlin—birds who knew their what's what."

"Uh-huh." Carey was unimpressed. "But it was a bust just the same. You got all the loot back, and he just managed to get away himself."

"A bad break for him," I explained. "Red O'Leary broke out with a complication of love and vanity. You can't chalk that against Papadopoulos. Don't get the idea he's half-smart. He's dangerous, and I don't blame the insurance companies for thinking they'll sleep better if they're sure he's not out where he can frame some more tricks against their policy-holding banks."

"Don't know much about this Papadopoulos, do you?"

"No." I told the truth. "And nobody does. The hundred-thousand offer made rats out of half the crooks in the country. They're as hot after him as we—not only because of the reward but because of his wholesale double-crossing. And they know just as little about him as we do—that he's had his fingers in a dozen or more jobs, that he was the brains behind Bluepoint Vance's bond tricks, and that his enemies have a habit of dying young. But nobody knows where he came from, or where he lives when he's home. Don't think I'm touting him as a Napoleon or a Sunday supplement mastermind—but he's a shifty, tricky old boy. As you say, I don't know much about him—but there are lots of people I don't know much about."

Tom-Tom Carey nodded to show me he understood the last part and began making his third cigarette.

"I was in Nogales when Angel Grace Cardigan got word to me that Paddy had been done in," he said. "That was nearly a month ago. She seemed to think I'd romp up here pronto—but it was no skin off my face. I let it sleep. But last week I read in a newspaper about all this reward money being posted on the hombre she blamed for Paddy's rub-out. That made it different—a hundred-thousand dollars different. So I shipped up here, talked to her, and then came in to make sure there'll be nothing between me and the blood money when I put the loop on this Papadoodle."

"Angel Grace sent you to me?" I inquired.

“Uh-huh—only she don’t know it. She dragged you into the story—said you were a friend of Paddy’s, a good guy for a sleuth and hungry as hell for this Papadoodle. So I thought you’d be the gent for me to see.”

“When did you leave Nogales?”

“Tuesday—last week.”

“That,” I said, prodding my memory, “was the day after Newhall was killed across the border.”

The swarthy man nodded. Nothing changed in his face.

“How far from Nogales was that?” I asked.

“He was gunned down near Oquitoa—that’s somewhere around sixty miles southwest of Nogales. You interested?”

“No—except I was wondering about your leaving the place where he was killed the day after he was killed, and coming up where he had lived. Did you know him?”

“He was pointed out to me in Nogales as a San Francisco millionaire going with a party to look at some mining property in Mexico. I was figuring on maybe selling him something later, but the Mexican patriots got him before I did.”

“And so you came north?”

“Uh-huh. The hubbub kind of spoiled things for me. I had a nice little business in—call it supplies—to and fro across the line. This Newhall killing turned the spotlight on that part of the country. So I thought I’d come up and collect that hundred thousand and give things a chance to settle down there. Honest, brother, I haven’t killed a millionaire in weeks, if that’s what’s worrying you.”

“That’s good. Now as I get it, you’re counting on landing Papadopoulos. Angel Grace sent for you, thinking you’d run him down just to even up for Paddy’s killing, but it’s the money you want, so you figure on playing with me as well as the Angel. That right?”

“Check.”

“You know what’ll happen if she learns you’re stringing along with me?”

“Uh-huh. She’ll chuck a convulsion—kind of balmy on the subject of keeping clear of the police, isn’t she?”

“She is—somebody told her something about honor among thieves once and she’s never got over it. Her brother’s doing a hitch up north now—Johnny the Plumber sold him out. Her man Paddy was mowed down by his pals. Did either of those things wake her up? Not a chance. She’d rather have Papadopoulos go free than join forces with us.”

“That’s all right,” Tom-Tom Carey assured me. “She thinks I’m the loyal brother—Paddy couldn’t have told her much about me—and I’ll handle her. You having her shadowed?”

I said, “Yes—ever since she was turned loose. She was picked up the same day Flora and Pogy and Red were grabbed, but we hadn’t anything on her except that she had been Paddy’s ladylove, so I had her sprung. How much dope did you get out of her?”

“Descriptions of Papadoodle and Nancy Regan, and that’s all. She don’t know any more about them than I do. Where does this Regan girl fit in?”

“Hardly any, except that she might lead us to Papadopoulos. She was Red’s girl. It was keeping a date with her that upset the game. When Papadopoulos wriggled out he took the girl with him. I don’t know why. She wasn’t in on the stick-ups.”

Tom-Tom Carey finished making and lighting his fourth cigarette and stood up.

“Are we teamed?” he asked as he picked up his hat.

“If you turn in Papadopoulos I’ll see that you get every nickel you’re entitled to,” I replied. “And I’ll give you a clear field—I won’t handicap you with too much of an attempt to keep my eyes on your actions.”

He said that was fair enough, told me he was stopping at a hotel in Ellis Street, and went away.

Calling the late Taylor Newhall’s office on the phone, I was told that if I wanted any information about his affairs I should try his country residence, some miles south of San Francisco. I tried it. A ministerial voice that said it belonged to the butler told me that Newhall’s attorney, Franklin Ellert, was the person I should see. I went over to Ellert’s office.

He was a nervous, irritable old man with a lisp and eyes that stuck out with blood pressure.

“Is there any reason,” I asked point-blank, “for supposing that Newhall’s murder was anything more than a Mexican bandit outburst? Is it likely that he was killed purposely, and not resisting capture?”

Lawyers don’t like to be questioned. This one sputtered and made faces at me and let his eyes stick out still further and, of course, didn’t give me an answer.

“How? How?” he snapped disagreeably. “Exthplain your meaning, thir!”

He glared at me and then at the desk, pushing papers around with excited hands, as if he were hunting for a police whistle. I told my story—told him about Tom-Tom Carey.

Ellert sputtered some more, demanded, “What the devil do you mean?” and made a complete jumble of the papers on his desk.

“I don’t mean anything,” I growled back. “I’m just telling you what was said.”

“Yeth! Yeth! I know!” He stopped glaring at me and his voice was less peevish. “But there ith abtholutely no reathon for thuthpecting anything of the thort. None at all, thir, none at all!”

“Maybe you’re right.” I turned to the door. “But I’ll poke into it a little anyway.”

“Wait! Wait!” He scrambled out of his chair and ran around the desk to me. “I think you are mithtaken, but if you are going to invethtigate it I would like to know what you dithcover. Perhaphth you’d better charge me with your regular fee for whatever ith done, and keep me informed of your progreth. Thatisthfactory?”

I said it was, came back to his desk and began to question him. There was, as the lawyer had said, nothing in Newhall’s affairs to stir us up. The dead man was several times a millionaire, with most of his money in mines. He had inherited nearly half his money. There was no shady practice, no claim-jumping, no trickery in his past, no enemies. He was a widower with one daughter. She had everything she wanted while he lived, and she and her father had been very fond of one another. He had gone to Mexico with a party of mining men from New York who expected to sell him some property there. They had been attacked by bandits, had driven them off, but Newhall and a geologist named Parker had been killed during the fight.

Back in the office I wrote a telegram to our Los Angeles branch, asking that an operative be sent to Nogales to pry into Newhall's killing and Tom-Tom Carey's affairs. The clerk to whom I gave it to be coded and sent told me the Old Man wanted to see me. I went into his office and was introduced to a short, roly-poly man named Hook.

"Mr. Hook," the Old Man said, "is the proprietor of a restaurant in Sausalito. Last Monday he employed a waitress named Nelly Riley. She told him she had come from Los Angeles. Her description, as Mr. Hook gives it, is quite similar to the description you and Counihan have given of Nancy Regan. Isn't it?" he asked the fat man.

"Absolutely. It's exactly what I read in the papers. She's five feet five inches tall, about, and medium in size, and she's got blue eyes and brown hair, and she's around twenty-one or two, and she's got looks, and the thing that counts most is she's high-hat as the devil—she don't think nothin's good enough for her. Why, when I tried to be a little sociable she told me to keep my 'dirty paws' to myself. And then I found out she didn't know hardly nothing about Los Angeles, though she claimed to have lived there two or three years. I bet you she's the girl, all right," and he went on talking about how much reward money he ought to get.

"Are you going back there now?" I asked him.

"Pretty soon. I got to stop and see about some dishes. Then I'm going back."

"This girl will be working?"

"Yes."

"Then, we'll send a man over with you—one who knows Nancy Regan."

I called Jack Counihan in from the operatives' room and introduced him to Hook. They arranged to meet in half an hour at the ferry and Hook waddled out.

"This Nelly Riley won't be Nancy Regan," I said. "But we can't afford to pass up even a hundred-to-one chance."

I told Jack and the Old Man about Tom-Tom Carey and my visit to Ellert's office. The Old Man listened with his usual polite attentiveness. Young Counihan—only four months in the man-hunting business—listened with wide eyes.

"You'd better run along now and meet Hook," I said when I had finished, leaving the Old Man's office with Jack. "And if she should be Nancy Regan—grab her and hang on." We were out of the Old Man's hearing, so I added, "And for God's sake don't let your youthful gallantry lead you to a poke in the jaw this time. Pretend you're grown up."

The boy blushed, said, "Go to hell!" adjusted his necktie, and set off to meet Hook.

I had some reports to write. After I had finished them I put my feet on my desk, made cavities in a package of Fatimas and thought about Tom-Tom Carey until six o'clock. Then I went down to the States for my abalone chowder and minute steak and home to change clothes before going out Sea Cliff way to sit in a poker game.

The telephone interrupted my dressing. Jack Counihan was on the other end.

"I'm in Sausalito. The girl wasn't Nancy, but I've got hold of something else. I'm not sure how to handle it. Can you come over?"

"Is it important enough to cut a poker game for?"

“Yes, it’s—I think it’s big.” He was excited. “I wish you would come over. I really think it’s a lead.”

“Where are you?”

“At the ferry there. Not the Golden Gate, the other.”

“All right. I’ll catch the first boat.”

An hour later I walked off the boat in Sausalito. Jack Counihan pushed through the crowd and began talking, “Coming down here on my way back—”

“Hold it till we get out of the mob,” I advised him. “It must be tremendous—the eastern point of your collar is bent.”

He mechanically repaired this defect in his otherwise immaculate costuming while we walked to the street, but he was too intent on whatever was on his mind to smile.

“Up this way,” he said, guiding me around a corner. “Hook’s lunchroom is on the corner. You can take a look at the girl if you like. She’s of the same size and complexion as Nancy Regan, but that is all. She’s a tough little job who probably was fired for dropping her chewing gum in the soup the last place she worked.”

“All right. That lets her out. Now what’s on your mind?”

“After I saw her I started back to the ferry. A boat came in while I was still a couple of blocks away. Two men who must have come in on it came up the street. They were Greeks, rather young, tough, though ordinarily I shouldn’t have paid much attention to them. But, since Papadopoulos is a Greek, we have been interested in them, of course, so I looked at these chaps. They were arguing about something as they walked, not talking loud, but scowling at one another. As they passed me the chap on the gutter side said to the other, ‘I tell him it’s been twenty-nine days.’

“Twenty-nine days. I counted back and it’s just twenty-nine days since we started hunting for Papadopoulos. He is a Greek and these chaps were Greeks. When I finished counting I turned around and began to follow them. They took me all the way through the town and up a hill on the fringe. They went to a little cottage—it couldn’t have more than three rooms—set back in a clearing in the woods by itself. There was a ‘For Sale’ sign on it, and no curtains in the windows, no sign of occupancy—but on the ground behind the back door there was a wet place, as if a bucket or pan of water had been thrown out.

“I stayed in the bushes until it got a little darker. Then I went closer. I could hear people inside, but I couldn’t see anything through the windows. They’re boarded up. After a while the two chaps I had followed came out, saying something in a language I couldn’t understand to whoever was in the cottage. The cottage door stayed open until the two men had gone out of sight down the path—so I couldn’t have followed them without being seen by whoever was at the door.

“Then the door was closed and I could hear people moving around inside—or perhaps only one person—and could smell cooking, and some smoke came out of the chimney. I waited and waited and nothing more happened and I thought I had better get in touch with you.”

“Sounds interesting,” I agreed.

We were passing under a street light. Jack stopped me with a hand on my arm and fished something out of his overcoat pocket.

“Look!” He held it out to me. A charred piece of blue cloth. It could have been the remains of a woman’s hat that had been three-quarters burned. I looked at it under the street light and then used my flashlight to examine it more closely.

“I picked it up behind the cottage while I was nosing around,” Jack said, “and—”

“And Nancy Regan wore a hat of that shade the night she and Papadopoulos vanished,” I finished for him. “On to the cottage.”

We left the street lights behind, climbed the hill, dipped down into a little valley, turned into a winding sandy path, left that to cut across sod between trees to a dirt road, trod half a mile of that, and then Jack led the way along a narrow path that wound through a black tangle of bushes and small trees. I hoped he knew where he was going.

“Almost there,” he whispered to me.

A man jumped out of the bushes and took me by the neck.

My hands were in my overcoat pocket—one holding the flashlight, the other my gun.

I pushed the muzzle of the pocketed gun toward the man—pulled the trigger.

The shot ruined seventy-five dollars’ worth of overcoat for me. But it took the man away from my neck.

That was lucky. Another man was on my back.

I tried to twist away from him—didn’t altogether make it—felt the edge of a knife along my spine.

That wasn’t so lucky—but it was better than getting the point.

I butted back at his face—missed—kept twisting and squirming while I brought my hands out of my pockets and clawed at him.

The blade of his knife came flat against my cheek. I caught the hand that held it and let myself go down backward—him under.

He said, “Uh!”

I rolled over, got hands and knees on the ground, was grazed by a fist, scrambled up.

Fingers dragged at my ankle.

My behavior was ungentlemanly. I kicked the fingers away—found the man’s body—kicked it twice—hard.

Jack’s voice whispered my name. I couldn’t see him in the blackness, nor could I see the man I had shot.

“All right here,” I told Jack. “How did you come out?”

“Top-hole. Is that all of it?”

“Don’t know, but I’m going to risk a peek at what I’ve got.”

Tilting my flashlight down at the man under my foot, I snapped it on. A thin blond man, his face bloodsmearred, his pink-rimmed eyes jerking as he tried to play ’possum in the glare.

“Come out of it!” I ordered.

A heavy gun went off back in the bush—another, lighter one. The bullets ripped through the foliage.

I switched off the light, bent to the man on the ground, knocked him on the top of the head with my gun.

“Crouch down low,” I whispered to Jack.

The smaller gun snapped again, twice. It was ahead, to the left.

I put my mouth to Jack's ear. "We're going to that damned cottage whether anybody likes it or no. Keep low and don't do any shooting unless you see what you're shooting at. Go ahead."

Bending as close to the ground as I could, I followed Jack up the path. The position stretched the slash in my back—a scalding pain from between my shoulders almost to my waist. I could feel blood trickling down over my hips—or thought I could.

The going was too dark for stealthiness. Things crackled under our feet, rustled against our shoulders. Our friends in the bush used their guns. Luckily the sound of twigs breaking and leaves rustling in pitch blackness isn't the best of targets. Bullets zipped here and there, but we didn't stop any of them. Neither did we shoot back. We halted where the end of the bush left the night a weaker gray.

"That's it," Jack said about a square shape ahead.

"On the jump," I grunted and lit out for the dark cottage.

Jack's long slim legs kept him easily at my side as we raced across the clearing.

A man-shape oozed from behind the blot of the building and his gun began to blink at us. The shots came so close together that they sounded like one long stuttering bang.

Pulling the youngster with me I flopped, flat to the ground except where a ragged-edged empty tin-can held my face up.

From the other side of the building another gun coughed. From a tree-stem to the right, a third. Jack and I began to burn powder back at them.

A bullet kicked my mouth full of dirt and pebbles. I spit mud and cautioned Jack, "You're shooting too high. Hold it low and pull easy."

A hump showed in the house's dark profile. I sent a bullet at it.

A man's voice yelled, "Ow-ooh!" and then, lower but very bitter, "Oh, damn you—damn you!"

For a warm couple of seconds bullets spattered all around us. Then there was not a sound to spoil the night's quietness.

When the silence had lasted five minutes, I got myself up on hands and knees and began to move forward, Jack following. The ground wasn't made for that sort of work. Ten feet of it was enough. We stood up and walked the rest of the way to the building.

"Wait," I whispered, and leaving Jack at one corner of the building, I circled it, seeing nobody, hearing nothing but the sounds I made.

We tried the front door. It was locked but rickety. Bumping it open with my shoulder, I went indoors—flashlight and gun in my fists.

The shack was empty.

Nobody—no furnishings—no traces of either in the two bare rooms—nothing but bare wooden walls, bare floor, bare ceiling with a stovepipe connected to nothing through it.

Jack and I stood in the middle of the floor, looked at the emptiness, and cursed the dump from back door to front for being empty. We hadn't quite finished when feet sounded outside, a white light beamed on the open doorway, and a cracked voice said, "Hey! You can come out one at a time—kind of easy-like!"

"Who says so?" I asked, snapping off the flashlight, moving over close to a side wall.

“A whole goldurned flock of deputy sheriffs,” the voice answered.

“Couldn’t you push one of ’em in and let us get a look at him?” I asked. “I’ve been choked and carved and shot at tonight until I haven’t got much faith left in anybody’s word.”

A lanky knock-kneed man with a thin leathery face appeared in the doorway. He showed me a buzzer, I fished out my credentials, and the other deputies came in. There were three of them in all.

“We were driving down the road bound for a little job near the point when we heard the shooting,” the lanky one explained. “What’s up?”

I told him.

“This shack’s been empty a long while,” he said when I had finished. “Anybody could have camped in it easy enough. Think it was that Papadopoulos, huh? We’ll kind of look around for him and his friends—especially since there’s that nice reward money.”

We searched the woods and found nobody. The man I had knocked down and the man I shot were both gone.

Jack and I rode back to Sausalito with the deputies. I hunted up a doctor there and had my back bandaged. He said the cut was long but shallow. Then we returned to San Francisco and separated in the direction of our homes.

And thus ended the day’s doings.

Here is something that happened next morning. I didn’t see it. I heard about it a little before noon and read about it in the papers that afternoon. I didn’t know then that I had personal interest in it, but later I did—so I’ll put it in here where it happened.

At ten o’clock that morning, into busy Market Street staggered a man who was naked from the top of his battered head to the soles of his bloodstained feet. From his bare chest and sides and back, little ribbons of flesh hung down, dripping blood. His left arm was broken in two places. The left side of his bald head was smashed in. An hour later he died in the emergency hospital—without having said a word to anyone, with the same vacant, distant look in his eyes.

The police easily ran back the trail of blood drops. They ended with a red smear in an alley beside a small hotel just off Market Street. In the hotel the police found the room from which the man had jumped, fallen or been thrown. The bed was soggy with blood. On it were torn and twisted sheets that had been knotted and used for rope. There was also a towel that had been used as a gag.

The evidence read that the naked man had been gagged, trussed up and worked on with a knife. The doctors said the ribbons of flesh had been cut loose, not torn or clawed. After the knife-user had gone away, the naked man had worked free of his bonds and, probably crazed by pain, had either jumped or fallen out of the window. The fall had crushed his skull and broken his arm, but he had managed to walk a block and a half.

The hotel management said the man had been there two days. He was registered as H.F. Barrows, City. He had a black Gladstone bag in which, besides clothes, shaving implements and so on, the police found a box of .38 cartridges, a black handkerchief with eyeholes cut in it, four skeleton keys, a small jimmy and a quantity of morphine, with a needle and the rest of the kit. Elsewhere in the

room they found the rest of his clothes, a .38 revolver and two quarts of liquor. They didn't find a cent.

The supposition was that Barrows had been a burglar, and that he had been tied up, tortured and robbed, probably by pals, between eight and nine that morning. Nobody knew anything about him. Nobody had seen his visitor or visitors. The room next to his on the left was unoccupied. The occupant of the room on the other side had left for his work in a furniture factory before seven o'clock.

While this was happening I was at the office, sitting forward in my chair to spare my back, reading reports, all of which told how operatives attached to various Continental Detective Agency branches had continued to fail to turn up any indications of the past, present or future whereabouts of Papadopoulos and Nancy Regan. There was nothing novel about these reports—I had been reading similar ones for three weeks.

The Old Man and I went out to luncheon together, and I told him about the previous night's adventures in Sausalito while we ate. His grandfatherly face was as attentive as always, and his smile as politely interested, but when I was half through my story he turned his mild blue eyes from my face to his salad, and he stared at his salad until I had finished talking. Then, still not looking up, he said he was sorry I had been cut. I thanked him and we ate a while.

Finally he looked at me. The mildness and courtesy he habitually wore over his cold-bloodedness were in his face and eyes and voice as he said, "This first indication that Papadopoulos is still alive came immediately after Tom-Tom Carey's arrival."

It was my turn to shift my eyes.

I looked at the roll I was breaking while I said, "Yes."

That afternoon a phone call came in from a woman out in the Mission who had seen some highly mysterious happenings and was sure they had something to do with the well-advertised bank robberies. So I went out to see her and spent most of the afternoon learning that half of her happenings were imaginary and the other half were the efforts of a jealous wife to get the low-down on her husband.

It was nearly six o'clock when I returned to the Agency. A few minutes later Dick Foley called me on the phone. His teeth were chattering so I could hardly get the words. "C-c-anyoug-g-get-t-townt-t-tooth-ar-r-rbr-r-spittle?"

"What?" I asked, and he said the same thing again, or worse. But by this time I had guessed that he was asking me if I could get down to the Harbor Hospital.

I told him I could in ten minutes, and with the help of a taxi I did.

The little Canadian operative met me at the hospital door. His clothes and hair were dripping wet, but he had had a shot of whiskey and his teeth had stopped chattering.

"Damned fool jumped in bay!" he barked as if it were my fault.

"Angel Grace?"

"Who else was I shadowing? Got on Oakland ferry. Moved off by self by rail. Thought she was going to throw something over. Kept eye on her. Bingo! She jumps." Dick sneezed. "I was goofy enough to jump after her. Held her up. Were fished out. In there," nodding his wet head toward the interior of the hospital.

"What happened before she took the ferry?"

“Nothing. Been in joint all day. Straight out to ferry.”

“How about yesterday?”

“Apartment all day. Out at night with man. Roadhouse. Home at four. Bad break. Couldn’t tail him off.”

“What did he look like?”

The man Dick described was Tom-Tom Carey.

“Good,” I said. “You’d better beat it home for a hot bath and some dry rags.” I went in to see the near-suicide.

She was lying on her back on a cot, staring at the ceiling. Her face was pale, but it always was, and her green eyes were no more sullen than usual. Except that her short hair was dark with dampness she didn’t look as if anything out of the ordinary had happened.

“You think of the funniest things to do,” I said when I was beside the bed.

She jumped and her face jerked around to me, startled. Then she recognized me and smiled—a smile that brought into her face the attractiveness that habitual sullenness kept out. “You have to keep in practice—sneaking up on people?” she asked. “Who told you I was here?”

“Everybody knows it. Your pictures are all over the front pages of the newspapers, with your life history and what you said to the Prince of Wales.”

She stopped smiling and looked steadily at me. “I got it!” she exclaimed after a few seconds. “That runt who came in after me was one of your ops—tailing me. Wasn’t he?”

“I didn’t know anybody had to go in after you,” I answered. “I thought you came ashore after you had finished your swim. Didn’t you want to land?”

She wouldn’t smile. Her eyes began to look at something horrible. “Oh! Why didn’t they let me alone?” she wailed, shuddering. “It’s a rotten thing, living.”

I sat down on a small chair beside the white bed and patted the lump her shoulder made in the sheets. “What was it?” I was surprised at the fatherly tone I achieved. “What did you want to die for, Angel?”

Words that wanted to be said were shiny in her eyes, tugged at muscles in her face, shaped her lips—but that was all. The words she said came out listlessly, but with a reluctant sort of finality. They were, “No. You’re law, I’m thief. I’m staying on my side of the fence. Nobody can say—”

“All right! All right!” I surrendered. “But for God’s sake don’t make me listen to another of those ethical arguments. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Thanks, no.”

“There’s nothing you want to tell me?”

She shook her head.

“You’re all right now?”

“Yes. I was being shadowed, wasn’t I? Or you wouldn’t have known about it so soon.”

“I’m a detective—I know everything. Be a good girl.”

From the hospital I went up to the Hall of Justice, to the police detective bureau. Lieutenant Duff was holding down the captain’s desk. I told him about the Angel’s dive.

“Got any idea what she was up to?” he wanted to know when I had finished.

“She’s too far off center to figure. I want her vagged.”

“Yeah? I thought you wanted her loose so you could catch her.”

“That’s about played out now. I’d like to try throwing her in the can for thirty days. Big Flora is in waiting trial. The Angel knows Flora was one of the troupe that rubbed out her Paddy. Maybe Flora don’t know the Angel. Let’s see what will come of mixing the two babies for a month.”

“Can do,” Duff agreed. “This Angel’s got no visible means of support and it’s a cinch she’s got no business running around jumping in people’s bays. I’ll put the word through.”

From the Hall of Justice I went up to the Ellis Street hotel at which Tom-Tom Carey had told me he was registered. He was out. I left word that I would be back in an hour and used that hour to eat. When I returned to the hotel the tall swarthy man was sitting in the lobby. He took me up to his room and set out gin, orange juice and cigars.

“Seen Angel Grace?” I asked.

“Yes, last night. We did the dumps.”

“Seen her today?”

“No.”

“She jumped in the bay this afternoon.”

“The hell she did.” He seemed moderately surprised.

“She was fished out. She’s O.K.”

The shadow in his eyes could have been some slight disappointment.

“She’s a funny sort of kid,” he remarked. “I wouldn’t say Paddy didn’t show good taste when he picked her, but she’s a queer one!”

“How’s the Papadopoulos hunt progressing?”

“It is. But you oughtn’t have split on your word. You halfway promised you wouldn’t have me shadowed.”

“I’m not the big boss,” I apologized. “Sometimes what I want don’t fit in with what the headman wants. This shouldn’t bother you much—you can shake him, can’t you?”

“Uh-huh. That’s what I’ve been doing. But it’s a damned nuisance jumping in and out of taxis and back doors.”

We talked and drank a few minutes longer, and then I left Carey’s room and hotel, and went to a drugstore telephone booth, where I called Dick Foley’s home, and gave Dick the swarthy man’s description and address. “I don’t want you to tail Carey, Dick. I want you to find out who is trying to tail him—and that shadower is the bird you’re to stick to. The morning will be time enough to start—get yourself dried out.”

And that was the end of that day.

I woke to a disagreeable rainy morning. Maybe it was the weather; maybe I’d been too frisky the day before; anyway the slit in my back was like a foot-long boil. I phoned Dr. Canova, who lived on the floor below me, and had him look at the cut before he left for his downtown office. He rebandaged it and told me to take life easy for a couple of days. It felt better after he had fooled with it, but I phoned the Agency and told the Old Man that unless something exciting broke I was going to stay on sick-call all day.

I spent the day propped up in front of the gas-log, reading and smoking cigarettes that wouldn’t burn right on account of the weather. That night I used

the phone to organize a poker game, in which I got very little action one way or the other. In the end I was fifteen dollars ahead, which was just about five dollars less than enough to pay for the booze my guests had drunk on me.

My back was better the following day, and so was the day. I went down to the Agency. There was a memorandum on my desk saying Duff had phoned that Angel Grace Cardigan had been vagged—thirty days in the city prison. There was a familiar pile of reports from various branches on their operatives' inability to pick up anything on Papadopoulos and Nancy Regan. I was running through these when Dick Foley came in.

"Made him," he reported. "Thirty or thirty-two. Five, six. Hundred, thirty. Sandy hair, complexion. Blue eyes. Thin face, some skin off. Rat. Lives dump in Seventh Street."

"What did he do?"

"Tailed Carey one block. Carey shook him. Hunted for Carey till two in morning. Didn't find him. Went home. Take him again?"

"Go up to his flophouse and find out who he is."

The little Canadian was gone half an hour.

"Sam Arlie," he said when he returned. "Been there six months. Supposed to be barber—when he's working—if ever."

"I've got two guesses about this Arlie," I told Dick. "The first is that he's the gink who carved me in Sausalito the other night. The second is that something's going to happen to him."

It was against Dick's rules to waste words, so he said nothing.

I called Tom-Tom Carey's hotel and got the swarthy man on the wire. "Come over," I invited him. "I've got some news for you."

"As soon as I'm dressed and breakfasted," he promised.

"When Carey leaves here you're to go along behind him," I told Dick after I had hung up. "If Arlie connects with him now, maybe there'll be something doing. Try to see it."

Then I phoned the detective bureau and made a date with Sergeant Hunt to visit Angel Grace Cardigan's apartment. After that I busied myself with paper work until Tommy came in to announce the swarthy man from Nogales.

"The jobbie who's tailing you," I informed him when he had sat down and begun work on a cigarette, "is a barber named Arlie," and I told him where Arlie lived.

"Yes. A slim-faced, sandy lad?"

I gave him the description Dick had given me.

"That's the hombre," Tom-Tom Carey said. "Know anything else about him?"

"No."

"You had Angel Grace vagged."

It was neither an accusation nor a question, so I didn't answer it.

"It's just as well," the tall man went on. "I'd have had to send her away. She was bound to gum things with her foolishness when I got ready to swing the loop."

"That'll be soon?"

"That all depends on how it happens." He stood up, yawned and shook his wide shoulders. "But nobody would starve to death if they decided not to eat any more till I'd got him. I oughtn't have accused you of having me shadowed."

"It didn't spoil my day."

Tom-Tom Carey said, "So long," and sauntered out.

I rode down to the Hall of Justice, picked up Hunt, and we went to the Bush Street apartment house in which Angel Grace Cardigan had lived. The manager—a highly scented fat woman with a hard mouth and soft eyes—already knew her tenant was in the cooler. She willingly took us up to the girl's room.

The Angel wasn't a good housekeeper. Things were clean enough, but upset. The kitchen sink was full of dirty dishes. The folding bed was worse than loosely made up. Clothes and odds and ends of feminine equipment hung over everything from bathroom to kitchen.

We got rid of the landlady and raked the place over thoroughly. We came away knowing all there was to know about the girl's wardrobe, and a lot about her personal habits. But we didn't find anything pointing Papadopoulos-ward.

No report came in on the Carey-Arlie combination that afternoon or evening, though I expected to hear from Dick every minute.

At three o'clock in the morning my bedside phone took my ear out of the pillows. The voice that came over the wire was the Canadian op's.

"Exit Arlie," he said.

"R.I.P.?"

"Yep."

"How?"

"Lead."

"Our lad's?"

"Yep."

"Keep till morning?"

"Yep."

"See you at the office," and I went back to sleep.

When I arrived at the Agency at nine o'clock, one of the clerks had just finished decoding a night letter from the Los Angeles operative who had been sent over to Nogales. It was a long telegram, and meaty.

It said that Tom-Tom Carey was well known along the border. For some six months he had been engaged in over-the-line traffic—guns going south, booze and probably dope and immigrants coming north. Just before leaving there the previous week he had made inquiries concerning one Hank Barrows. This Hank Barrows' description fit the H. F. Barrows who had been cut into ribbons, who had fallen out of the hotel window and died.

The Los Angeles operative hadn't been able to get much of a line on Barrows, except that he hailed from San Francisco, had been on the border only a few days and had apparently returned to San Francisco. The operative had turned up nothing new on the Newhall killing—the signs still read that he had been killed resisting capture by Mexican patriots.

Dick Foley came into my office while I was reading the news. When I had finished he gave me his contribution to the history of Tom-Tom Carey.

"Tailed him out of here. To hotel. Arlie on corner. Eight o'clock, Carey out. Garage. Hire car without driver. Back hotel. Checked out. Two bags. Out through park. Arlie after him in flivver. My boat after Arlie. Down boulevard. Off crossroad. Dark. Lonely. Arlie steps on gas. Closed in. Bang! Carey stops. Two guns going.

Exit Arlie. Carey back to city. Hotel Marquis. Registers George F. Danby, San Diego. Room 622.”

“Did Tom-Tom frisk Arlie after he dropped him?”

“No. Didn’t touch him.”

“So? Take Mickey Linehan with you. Don’t let Carey get out of your sight. I’ll get somebody up to relieve you and Mickey late tonight, if I can, but he’s got to be shadowed twenty-four hours a day until—” I didn’t know what came after that so I stopped talking.

I took Dick’s story into the Old Man’s office and told it to him, winding up, “Arlie shot first, according to Foley, so Carey gets a self-defence on it, but we’re getting action at last and I don’t want to do anything to slow it up. So I’d like to keep what we know about this shooting quiet for a couple of days. It won’t increase our friendship any with the county sheriff if he finds out what we’re doing, but I think it’s worth it.”

“If you wish,” the Old Man agreed, reaching for his ringing phone.

He spoke into the instrument and passed it on to me. Detective-sergeant Hunt was talking, “Flora Brace and Grace Cardigan crushed out just before daylight. The chances are they—”

I wasn’t in a humor for details. “A clean sneak?” I asked.

“Not a lead on ’em so far, but—”

“I’ll get the details when I see you. Thanks,” and I hung up. “Angel Grace and Big Flora have escaped from the city prison,” I passed the news on to the Old Man.

He smiled courteously, as if at something that didn’t especially concern him. “You were congratulating yourself on getting action,” he murmured.

I turned my scowl to a grin, mumbled, “Well, maybe,” went back to my office and telephoned Franklin Ellert. The lisping attorney said he would be glad to see me, so I went over to his office.

“And now, what progreth have you made?” he asked eagerly when I was seated beside his desk.

“Some. A man named Barrows was also in Nogales when Newhall was killed, and also came to San Francisco right after. Carey followed Barrows up here. Did you read about the man found walking the streets naked, all cut up?”

“Yeth.”

“That was Barrows. Then another man comes into the game—a barber named Arlie. He was spying on Carey. Last night, in a lonely road south of here, Arlie shot at Carey. Carey killed him.”

The old lawyer’s eyes came out another inch. “What road?” he gasped.

“You want the exact location?”

“Yeth!”

I pulled his phone over, called the Agency, had Dick’s report read to me, gave the attorney the information he wanted.

It had an effect on him. He hopped out of his chair. Sweat was shining along the ridges wrinkles made in his face. “Mith Newhall ith down there alone! That path ith only half a mile from her houth!”

I frowned and beat my brains together, but I couldn’t make anything out of it. “Suppose I put a man down there to look after her?” I suggested.

“Exthellent!” His worried face cleared until there weren’t more than fifty or sixty wrinkles in it. “She would prefer to thtay there during her firth grief over her fatherth death. You will thend a capable man?”

“The Rock of Gibralter is a leaf in the breeze beside him. Give me a note for him to take down. Andrew MacElroy is his name.”

While the lawyer scribbled the note I used his phone again to call the Agency, to tell the operator to get hold of Andy and tell him I wanted him. I ate lunch before I returned to the Agency. Andy was waiting when I got there.

Andy MacElroy was a big boulder of a man—not very tall, but thick and hard of head and body. A glum, grim man with no more imagination than an adding machine. I’m not even sure he could read. But I was sure that when Andy was told to do something, he did it and nothing else. He didn’t know enough not to.

I gave him the lawyer’s note to Miss Newhall, told him where to go and what to do, and Miss Newhall’s troubles were off my mind.

Three times that afternoon I heard from Dick Foley and Mickey Linehan. Tom-Tom Carey wasn’t doing anything very exciting, though he had bought two boxes of .44 cartridges in a Market Street sporting goods establishment.

The afternoon papers carried photographs of Big Flora Brace and Angel Grace Cardigan, with a story of their escape. The story was as far from the probable facts as newspaper stories generally are. On another page was an account of the discovery of the dead barber in the lonely road. He had been shot in the head and in the chest, four times in all. The county officials’ opinion was that he had been killed resisting a stick-up and that the bandits had fled without robbing him.

At five o’clock Tommy Howd came to my door. “That guy Carey wants to see you again,” the freckle-faced boy said.

“Shoot him in.”

The swarthy man sauntered in, said “Howdy,” sat down, and made a brown cigarette. “Got anything special on for tonight?” he asked when he was smoking.

“Nothing I can’t put aside for something better. Giving a party?”

“Uh-huh. I had thought of it. A kind of surprise party for Papadoodle. Want to go along?”

It was my turn to say, “Uh-huh.”

“I’ll pick you up at eleven—Van Ness and Geary,” he drawled. “But this has got to be a kind of tight party—just you and me—and him.”

“No. There’s one more who’ll have to be in on it. I’ll bring him along.”

“I don’t like that.” Tom-Tom Carey shook his head slowly, frowning amiably over his cigarette. “You sleuths oughtn’t outnumber me. It ought to be one and one.”

“You won’t be outnumbered,” I explained. “This jobbie I’m bringing won’t be on my side more than yours. And it’ll pay you to keep as sharp an eye on him as I do—and to see he don’t get behind either of us if we can help it.”

“Then what do you want to lug him along for?”

“Wheels within wheels,” I grinned.

The swarthy man frowned again, less amiably now. “The hundred and six thousand reward money—I’m not figuring on sharing that with anybody.”

“Right enough,” I agreed. “Nobody I bring along will declare themselves in on it.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” He stood up. “And we’ve got to watch this hombre, huh?”

“If we want everything to go all right.”

“Suppose he gets in the way—cuts up on us. Can we put it to him, or do we just say, ‘Naughty! Naughty!’ ”

“He’ll have to take his own chances.”

“Fair enough.” His hard face was good-natured again as he moved toward the door. “Eleven o’clock at Van Ness and Geary.”

I went back into the operatives’ room, where Jack Counihan was slumped down in a chair reading a magazine.

“I hope you’ve thought up something for me to do,” he greeted me. “I’m getting bedsores from sitting around.”

“Patience son, patience—that’s what you’ve got to learn if you’re ever going to be a detective. Why, when I was a child your age, just starting in with the Agency, I was lucky—”

“Don’t start that,” he begged. Then his good-looking young face got earnest. “I don’t see why you keep me cooped up here. I’m the only one besides you who really got a good look at Nancy Regan. I should think you would have me out hunting for her.”

“I told the Old Man the same thing,” I sympathized. “But he is afraid to risk something happening to you. He says in all his fifty years of gumshoeing he’s never seen such a handsome op, besides being a fashion plate and a social butterfly and the heir to millions. His idea is we ought to keep you as sort of showpiece and not let you—”

“Go to hell!” Jack said, all red in the face.

“But I persuaded him to let me take the cotton packing off you tonight,” I continued. “So meet me at Van Ness and Geary before eleven o’clock.”

“Action?” He was all eagerness.

“Maybe.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Bring your little pop-gun along.” An idea came into my head and I worded it. “You’d better be all dressed up—evening duds.”

“Dinner coat?”

“No—the limit—everything but the high hat. Now for your behavior: you’re not supposed to be an op. I’m not sure just what you’re supposed to be, but it doesn’t make any difference. Tom-Tom Carey will be along. You act as if you were neither my friend nor his—as if you didn’t trust either of us. We’ll be cagey with you. If anything is asked that you don’t know the answer to you fall back on hostility. But don’t crowd Carey too far. Got it?”

“I—I think so.” He spoke slowly, screwing up his forehead. “I’m to act as if I was going along on the same business as you, but that outside of that we weren’t friends. As if I wasn’t willing to trust you. That it?”

“Very much. Watch yourself. You’ll be swimming in nitroglycerine all the way.”

“What is up? Be a good chap and give me some idea.”

I grinned up at him. He was a lot taller than I.

“I could,” I admitted, “but I’m afraid it would scare you off. So I’d better tell you nothing. Be happy while you can. Eat a good dinner. Lots of condemned folks seem to eat hearty breakfasts of ham and eggs just before they parade out to the rope. Maybe you wouldn’t want ’em for dinner, but—”

At five minutes to eleven that night, Tom-Tom Carey brought a black touring car to the corner where Jack and I stood waiting in a fog that was like a damp fur coat.

“Climb in,” he ordered as we came to the curb.

I opened the front door and motioned Jack in. He rang up the curtain on his little act, looking coldly at me and opening the rear door.

“I’m going to sit back here,” he said bluntly.

“Not a bad idea,” and I climbed in beside him.

Carey twisted around in his seat and he and Jack stared at each other for a while. I said nothing, did not introduce them. When the swarthy man had finished sizing the youngster up, he looked from the boy’s collar and tie—all of his evening clothes not hidden by his overcoat—to me, grinned, and drawled, “Your friend’s a waiter, huh?”

I laughed, because the indignation that darkened the boy’s face and popped his mouth open was natural, not part of his acting. I pushed my foot against his. He closed his mouth, said nothing, looked at Tom-Tom Carey and me as if we were specimens of some lower form of animal life.

I grinned back at Carey and asked, “Are we waiting for anything?”

He said we weren’t, left off staring at Jack, and put the machine in motion. He drove us out through the park, down the boulevard. Traffic going our way and the other loomed out of and faded into the fog-thick night. Presently we left the city behind and ran out of the fog into clear moonlight. I didn’t look at any of the machines running behind us, but I knew that in one of them Dick Foley and Mickey Linehan should be riding.

Tom-Tom Carey swung our car off the boulevard into a road that was smooth and well made, but not much traveled.

“Wasn’t a man killed down along here somewhere last night?” I asked.

Carey nodded his head without turning it and, when we had gone another quarter-mile, said, “Right here.”

We rode a little slower now, and Carey turned off his lights. In the road that was half moon-silver, half shadow-gray, the machine barely crept along for perhaps a mile. We stopped in the shade of tall shrubs that darkened a spot of the road.

“All ashore that’s going ashore,” Tom-Tom Carey said, and got out of the car.

Jack and I followed him. Carey took off his overcoat and threw it into the machine.

“The place is just around the bend, back from the road,” he told us. “Damn this moon! I was counting on fog.”

I said nothing, nor did Jack. The boy’s face was white and excited.

“We’ll beeline it,” Carey said, leading the way across the road to a high wire fence.

He went over the fence first, then Jack, then—the sound of someone coming along the road from ahead stopped me. Signalling silence to the two men on the other side of the fence, I made myself small beside a bush. The coming steps were light, quick, feminine.

A girl came into the moonlight just ahead. She was a girl of twenty-something, neither tall nor short, thin nor plump. She was short-skirted, bare-haired, sweated. Terror was in her white face, in the carriage of her hurrying figure—but

something else was there too—more beauty than a middle-aged sleuth was used to seeing.

When she saw Carey's automobile bulking in the shadow, she stopped abruptly, with a gasp that was almost a cry.

I walked forward, saying, "Hello, Nancy Regan."

This time the gasp was a cry. "Oh! Oh!" Then, unless the moonlight was playing tricks, she recognized me and terror began to go away from her. She put both hands out to me, with relief in the gesture.

"Well?" A bearish grumble came from the big boulder of a man who had appeared out of the darkness behind her. "What's all this?"

"Hello, Andy," I greeted the boulder.

"Hullo," MacElroy echoed and stood still.

Andy always did what he was told to do. He had been told to take care of Miss Newhall. I looked at the girl and then at him again.

"Is this Miss Newhall?" I asked.

"Yeah," he rumbled. "I came down like you said, but she told me she didn't want me—wouldn't let me in the house. But you hadn't said anything about coming back. So I just camped outside, moseying around, keeping my eyes on things. And when I seen her shinnying out a window a little while ago, I just went on along behind her to take care of her, like you said I was to do."

Tom-Tom Carey and Jack Counihan came back into the road, crossed it to us. The swarthy man had an automatic in one hand. The girl's eyes were glued on mine. She paid no attention to the others.

"What is it all about?" I asked her.

"I don't know," she babbled, her hands holding on to mine, her face close to mine. "Yes, I'm Ann Newhall. I didn't know. I thought it was fun. And then when I found out it wasn't, I couldn't get out of it."

Tom-Tom Carey grunted and stirred impatiently. Jack Counihan was staring down the road. Andy MacElroy stood stolid in the road, waiting to be told what to do next. The girl never once looked from me to any of these others.

"How did you get in with them?" I demanded. "Talk fast."

I had told the girl to talk fast. She did. For twenty minutes she stood there and turned out words in a chattering stream that had no breaks except where I cut in to keep her from straying from the path I wanted her to follow. It was jumbled, almost incoherent in spots, and not always plausible, but the notion stayed with me throughout that she was trying to tell the truth—most of the time.

And not for a fraction of a second did she turn her gaze from my eyes. It was as if she was afraid to look anywhere else.

This millionaire's daughter had, two months before, been one of a party of four young people returning late at night from some sort of social affair down the coast. Somebody suggested that they stop at a roadhouse along their way—a particularly tough joint. Its toughness was its attraction, of course—toughness was more or less of a novelty to them. They got a firsthand view of it that night, for, nobody knew just how, they found themselves taking part in a row before they had been ten minutes in the dump.

The girl's escort had shamed her by showing an unreasonable amount of cowardice. He had let Red O'Leary turn him over his knee and spank him—and

had done nothing about it afterward. The other youth in the party had been not much braver. The girl, insulted by this meekness, had walked across to the red-haired giant who had wrecked her escort, and she had spoken to him loud enough for everybody to hear, "Will you please take me home?"

Red O'Leary was glad to do it. She left him a block or two from her city house. She told him her name was Nancy Regan. He probably doubted it, but he never asked her any questions, pried into her affairs. In spite of the difference in their worlds, a genuine companionship had grown up between them. She liked him. He was so gloriously a roughneck that she saw him as a romantic figure. He was in love with her, knew she was miles above him, and so she had no trouble making him behave so far as she was concerned.

They met often. He took her to all the rowdy holes in the bay district, introduced her to yeggs, gunmen, swindlers, told her wild tales of criminal adventuring. She knew he was a crook, knew he was tied up in the Seamen's National and Golden Gate Trust jobs when they broke. But she saw it all as a sort of theatrical spectacle. She didn't see it as it was.

She woke up the night they were in Larrouy's and were jumped by the crooks that Red had helped Papadopoulos and the others double-cross. But it was too late then for her to wriggle clear. She was blown along with Red to Papadopoulos' hangout after I had shot the big lad. She saw then what her romantic figures really were—what she had mixed herself with.

When Papadopoulos escaped, taking her with him, she was wide awake, cured, through forever with her dangerous trifling with outlaws. So she thought. She thought Papadopoulos was the little, scary old man he seemed to be—Flora's slave, a harmless old duffer too near the grave to have any evil in him. He had been whining and terrified. He begged her not to forsake him, pleaded with her while tears ran down his withered cheeks, begging her to hide him from Flora. She took him to her country house and let him fool around in the garden, safe from prying eyes. She had no idea that he had known who she was all along, had guided her into suggesting this arrangement.

Even when the newspapers said he had been the commander-in-chief of the thug army, when the hundred-and-six-thousand-dollar reward was offered for his arrest, she believed in his innocence. He convinced her that Flora and Red had simply put the blame for the whole thing on him so they could get off with lighter sentences. He was such a frightened old gink—who wouldn't have believed him?

Then her father's death in Mexico had come and grief had occupied her mind to the exclusion of most other things until this day, when Big Flora and another girl—probably Angel Grace Cardigan—had come to the house. She had been deathly afraid of Big Flora when she had seen her before. She was more afraid now. And she soon learned that Papadopoulos was not Flora's slave but her master. She saw the old buzzard as he really was. But that wasn't the end of her awakening.

Angel Grace had suddenly tried to kill Papadopoulos. Flora had overpowered her. Grace, defiant, had told them she was Paddy's girl. Then she had screamed at Ann Newhall, "And you, you damned fool, don't you know they killed your father? Don't you know—?"

Big Flora's fingers, around Angel Grace's throat, stopped her words. Flora tied up the Angel and turned to the Newhall girl.

"You're in it," she said brusquely. "You're in it up to your neck. You'll play along with us, or else. Here's how it stands, dearie. The old man and I are both due to step off if we're caught. And you'll do the dance with us. I'll see to that. Do what you're told and we'll all come through all right. Get funny and I'll beat holy hell out of you."

The girl didn't remember much after that. She had a dim recollection of going to the door and telling Andy she didn't want his services. She did this mechanically, not even needing to be prompted by the big blonde woman who stood close behind her. Later, in the same fearful daze, she had gone out her bedroom window, down the vine-covered side of the porch, and away from the house, running along the road, not going anywhere, just escaping.

That was what I learned from the girl. She didn't tell me all of it. She told me very little of it in those words. But that is the story I got by combining her words, her manner of telling them, her facial expressions, with what I already knew and what I could guess.

And not once while she talked had her eyes turned from mine. Not once had she shown that she knew there were other men standing in the road with us. She stared into my face with a desperate fixity, as if she was afraid not to, and her hands held mine as if she might sink through the ground if she let go.

"How about your servants?" I asked.

"There aren't any there now."

"Papadopoulos persuaded you to get rid of them?"

"Yes—several days ago."

"Then Papadopoulos, Flora and Angel Grace are alone in the house now?"

"Yes."

"They know you ducked?"

"I don't know. I don't think they do. I had been in my room some time. I don't think they suspected I'd dare do anything but what they told me."

It annoyed me to find I was staring into the girl's eyes as fixedly as she into mine, and that when I wanted to take my gaze away it wasn't easily done. I jerked my eyes away from her, took my hands away.

"The rest of it you can tell me later," I growled, and turned to give Andy MacElroy his orders. "You stay here with Miss Newhall until we get back from the house. Make yourselves comfortable in the car."

The girl put a hand on my arm. "Am I—? Are you—?"

"We're going to turn you over to the police, yes," I assured her.

"No! No!"

"Don't be childish," I begged. "You can't run around with a mob of cutthroats, get yourself tied up in a flock of crimes, and then when you're tripped say, 'Excuse it, please,' and go free. If you tell the whole story in court—including the parts you haven't told me—the chances are you'll get off. But there's no way in God's world for you to escape arrest. Come on," I told Jack and Tom-Tom Carey. "We've got to shake it up if we want to find our folks at home."

Looking back as I climbed the fence, I saw that Andy had put the girl in the car and was getting in himself. "Just a moment," I called to Jack and Carey, who were already starting across the field.

"Thought of something else to kill time," the swarthy man complained.

I went back across the road to the car and spoke quickly and softly to Andy, "Dick Foley and Mickey Linehan should be hanging around the neighborhood. As soon as we're out of sight, hunt 'em up. Turn Miss Newhall over to Dick. Tell him to take her with him and beat it for a phone—rouse the sheriff. Tell Dick he's to turn the girl over to the sheriff, to hold for the San Francisco police. Tell him he's not to give her up to anybody else—not even to me. Got it?"

"Got it."

"All right. After you've told him that and have given him the girl, then you bring Mickey Linehan to the Newhall house as fast as you can make it. We'll likely need all the help we can get as soon as we can get it."

"Got you," Andy said.

"What are you up to?" Tom-Tom Carey asked suspiciously when I rejoined Jack and him.

"Detective business."

"I ought to have come down and turned the trick all by myself," he grumbled. "You haven't done a damned thing but waste time since we started."

"I'm not the one that's wasting it now."

He snorted and set out across the field again, Jack and I following him. At the end of the field there was another fence to be climbed. Then we came over a little wooded ridge and the Newhall house lay before us—a large white house, glistening in the moonlight, with yellow rectangles where blinds were down over the windows of lighted rooms. The lighted rooms were on the ground floor. The upper floor was dark. Everything was quiet.

"Damn the moonlight!" Tom-Tom Carey repeated, bringing another automatic out of his clothes so that he now had one in each hand.

Jack started to take his gun out, looked at me, saw I was letting mine rest, let his slide back in his pocket.

Tom-Tom Carey's face was a dark stone mask—slits for eyes, slit for mouth—the grim mask of a manhunter, a mankiller. He was breathing softly, his big chest moving gently. Beside him Jack Counihan looked like an excited schoolboy. His face was ghastly, his eyes all stretched out of shape, and he was breathing like a tire pump. But his grin was genuine, for all the nervousness in it.

"We'll cross to the house on this side," I whispered. "Then one of us can take the front, one the back, and the other can wait till he sees where he's needed most. Right?"

"Right," the swarthy one agreed.

"Wait!" Jack exclaimed. "The girl came down the vines from an upper window. What's the matter with my going up that way? I'm lighter than either of you. If they haven't missed her, the window would still be open. Give me ten minutes to find the window, get through it, and get myself placed. Then when you attack I'll be there behind them. How's that?" he demanded applause.

"And what if they grab you as soon as you light?" I objected.

“Suppose they do. I can make enough racket for you to hear. You can gallop to the attack while they’re busy with me. That’ll be just as good.”

“Blue hell!” Tom-Tom Carey barked. “What good’s all that? The other way’s best. One of us at the front door, one at the back, kick ’em in and go in shooting.”

“If this new one works, it’ll be better,” I gave my opinion. “If you want to jump in the furnace, Jack, I won’t stop you. I won’t cheat you out of your heroics.”

“No!” the swarthy man snarled. “Nothing doing!”

“Yes,” I contradicted him. “We’ll try it. Better take twenty minutes, Jack. That won’t give you any time to waste.”

He looked at his watch and I at mine, and he turned toward the house.

Tom-Tom Carey, scowling darkly, stood in his way. I cursed and got between the swarthy man and the boy. Jack went around my back and hurried away across the too-bright space between us and the house.

“Keep your feet on the ground,” I told Carey. “There are a lot of things to this game you don’t know anything about.”

“Too damned many!” he snarled, but he let the boy go.

There was no open second-story window on our side of the building. Jack rounded the rear of the house and went out of sight.

A faint rustling sounded behind us. Carey and I spun together. His guns went up. I stretched out an arm across them, pushing them down.

“Don’t have a hemorrhage,” I cautioned him. “This is just another of the things you don’t know about.”

The rustling had stopped.

“All right,” I called softly.

Mickey Linehan and Andy MacElroy came out of the tree-shadows.

Tom-Tom Carey stuck his face so close to mine that I’d have been scratched if he had forgotten to shave that day.

“You double-crossing—”

“Behave! Behave! A man of your age!” I admonished him. “None of these boys want any of your blood money”

“I don’t like this gang stuff,” he snarled. “We—”

“We’re going to need all the help we can get,” I interrupted, looking at my watch. I told the two operatives: “We’re going to close in on the house now. Four of us ought to be able to wrap it up snug. You know Papadopoulos, Big Flora and Angel Grace by description. They’re in there. Don’t take any chances with them—Flora and Papadopoulos are dynamite. Jack Counihan is trying to ease inside now. You two look after the back of the joint. Carey and I will take the front. We’ll make the play. You see that nobody leaks out on us. Forward march!”

The swarthy man and I headed for the front porch—a wide porch, grown over with vines on the side, yellowly illuminated now by the light that came through four curtained French windows.

We hadn’t taken our first steps across the porch when one of these tall windows moved—opened.

The first thing I saw was Jack Counihan’s back.

He was pushing the casement open with a hand and foot, not turning his head.

Beyond the boy—facing him across the brightly lighted room—stood a man and woman. The man was old, small, scrawny, wrinkled, pitifully frightened—

Papadopoulos. I saw he had shaved off his straggly white mustache. The woman was tall, full-bodied, pink-fleshed and yellow-haired—a she-athlete of forty with clear gray eyes set deep in a handsome brutal face—Big Flora Brace. They stood very still, side by side, watching the muzzle of Jack Counihan’s gun.

While I stood in front of the window looking at this scene, Tom-Tom Carey, his two guns up, stepped past me, going through the tall window to the boy’s side. I did not follow him into the room.

Papadopoulos’ scary brown eyes darted to the swarthy man’s face. Flora’s gray ones moved there deliberately, and then looked past him to me.

“Hold it, everybody!” I ordered, and moved away from the window, to the side of the porch where the vines were thinnest.

Leaning out between the vines, so my face was clear in the moonlight, I looked down the side of the building. A shadow in the shadow of the garage could have been a man. I put an arm out in the moonlight and beckoned. The shadow came toward me—Mickey Linehan. Andy MacElroy’s head peeped around the back of the house. I beckoned again and he followed Mickey.

I returned to the open window.

Papadopoulos and Flora—a rabbit and a lioness—stood looking at the guns of Carey and Jack. They looked again at me when I appeared, and a smile began to curve the woman’s full lips.

Mickey and Andy came up and stood beside me. The woman’s smile died grimly.

“Carey,” I said, “you and Jack stay as is. Mickey, Andy, go in and take hold of our gifts from God.”

When the two operatives stepped through the window—things happened.

Papadopoulos screamed.

Big Flora lunged against him, knocking him at the back door. “Go! Go!” she roared.

Stumbling, staggering, he scrambled across the room.

Flora had a pair of guns—sprung suddenly in her hands. Her big body seemed to fill the room, as if by willpower she had become a giantess. She charged—straight at the guns Jack and Carey held—blotting the back door and the fleeing man from their fire.

A blur to one side was Andy MacElroy moving.

I had a hand on Jack’s gun arm.

“Don’t shoot,” I muttered in his ear.

Flora’s guns thundered together. But she was tumbling. Andy had crashed into her. Had thrown himself at her legs as a man would throw a boulder.

When Flora tumbled, Tom-Tom Carey stopped waiting.

His first bullet was sent so close past her that it clipped her curled yellow hair. But it went past—caught Papadopoulos just as he went through the door. The bullet took him low in the back—smearing him out on the floor.

Carey fired again—again—again—into the prone body.

“It’s no use,” I growled. “You can’t make him any deader.”

He chuckled and lowered his guns.

“Four into a hundred and six.” All his ill-humor, his grimness was gone. “That’s twenty-six thousand, five hundred dollars each of those slugs was worth to me.”

Andy and Mickey had wrestled Flora into submission and were hauling her up off the floor.

I looked from them back to the swarthy man, muttering, "It's not all over yet."

"No?" He seemed surprised. "What next?"

"Stay awake and let your conscience guide you," I replied, and turned to the Coughlin youngster. "Come along, Jack."

I led the way out through the window and across the porch, where I leaned against the railing. Jack followed and stood in front of me, his gun still in his hand, his face white and tired from nervous tension. Looking over his shoulder, I could see the room we had just quit. Andy and Mickey and Flora sitting between them on a sofa. Carey stood a little to one side, looking curiously at Jack and me. We were in the middle of the band of light that came through the open window. We could see inside—except that Jack's back was that way—and could be seen from there, but our talk couldn't be overheard unless we made it loud.

All that was as I wanted it.

"Now tell me about it," I ordered Jack.

"Well, I found the open window," the boy began.

"I know all that part," I cut in. "You came in and told your friends—Papadopoulos and Flora—about the girl's escape, and that Carey and I were coming. You advised them to make out you had captured them single-handed. That would draw Carey and me in. With you unsuspected behind us, it would be easy for the three of you to grab the two of us. After that you could stroll down the road and tell Andy I had sent you for the girl. That was a good scheme—except that you didn't know I had Dick and Mickey up my sleeve, didn't know I wouldn't let you get behind me. But all that isn't what I want to know. I want to know why you sold us out—and what you think you're going to do now."

"Are you crazy?" His young face was bewildered, his young eyes horrified. "Or is this some—?"

"Sure, I'm crazy," I confessed. "Wasn't I crazy enough to let you lead me into that trap in Sausalito? But I wasn't too crazy to figure it out afterward. I wasn't too crazy to see that Ann Newhall was afraid to look at you. I'm not crazy enough to think you could have captured Papadopoulos and Flora unless they wanted you to. I'm crazy—but in moderation."

Jack laughed—a reckless young laugh, but too shrill. His eyes didn't laugh with mouth and voice. While he was laughing his eyes looked from me to the gun in his hand and back to me.

"Talk, Jack," I pleaded huskily, putting a hand on his shoulder. "For God's sake why did you do it?"

The boy shut his eyes, gulped, and his shoulders twitched. When his eyes opened they were hard and glittering and full of merry hell. "The worst part of it," he said harshly, moving his shoulder from under my hand, "is that I wasn't a very good crook, was I? I didn't succeed in deluding you."

I said nothing.

"I suppose you've earned your right to the story," he went on after a little pause. His voice was consciously monotonous, as if he was deliberately keeping out of it every tone or accent that might seem to express emotion. He was too young to talk naturally. "I met Ann Newhall three weeks ago, in my own home. She had gone to

school with my sisters, though I had never met her before. We knew each other at once, of course—I knew she was Nancy Regan, she knew I was a Continental operative.

“So we went off by ourselves and talked things over. Then she took me to see Papadopoulos. I liked the old boy and he liked me. He showed me how we together could accumulate unheard-of piles of wealth. So there you are. The prospect of all that money completely devastated my morals. I told him about Carey as soon as I had heard from you, and I led you into that trap, as you say. He thought it would be better if you stopped bothering us before you found the connection between Newhall and Papadopoulos.

“After that failure, he wanted me to try again, but I refused to have a hand in any more fiascos. There’s nothing sillier than a murder that doesn’t come off. Ann Newhall is quite innocent of everything except folly. I don’t think she has the slightest suspicion that I have had any part in the dirty work beyond refraining from having everybody arrested. That, my dear Sherlock, about concludes the confession.”

I had listened to the boy’s story with a great show of sympathetic attentiveness. Now I scowled at him and spoke accusingly, but still not without friendliness.

“Stop spoofing! The money Papadopoulos showed you didn’t buy you. You met the girl and were too soft to turn her in. But your vanity—your pride in looking at yourself as a pretty cold proposition—wouldn’t let you admit it even to yourself. You had to have a hard-boiled front. So you were meat to Papadopoulos’ grinder. He gave you a part you could play to yourself—a super-gentleman-crook, a mastermind, a desperate suave villain, and all that kind of romantic garbage. That’s the way you went, my son. You went as far as possible beyond what was needed to save the girl from the hoosegow—just to show the world, but chiefly yourself, that you were not acting through sentimentality, but according to your own reckless desires. There you are. Look at yourself.”

Whatever he saw in himself—what I had seen or something else—his face slowly reddened, and he wouldn’t look at me. He looked past me at the distant road.

I looked into the lighted room beyond him. Tom-Tom Carey had advanced to the center of the floor, where he stood watching us. I jerked a corner of my mouth at him—a warning.

“Well,” the boy began again, but he didn’t know what to say after that. He shuffled his feet and kept his eyes from my face.

I stood up straight and got rid of the last trace of my hypocritical sympathy.

“Give me your gun, you lousy rat!” I snarled at him.

He jumped back as if I had hit him. Crazy madness writhed in his face. He jerked his gun chest-high.

Tom-Tom Carey saw the gun go up. The swarthy man fired twice. Jack Counihan was dead at my feet.

Mickey Linehan fired once. Carey was down on the floor, bleeding from the temple.

I stepped over Jack’s body, went into the room, knelt beside the swarthy man. He squirmed, tried to say something, died before he could get it out. I waited until my face was straight before I stood up.

Big Flora was studying me with narrowed gray eyes. I stared back at her.

"I don't get it all yet," she said slowly, "but if you—"

"Where's Angel Grace?" I interrupted.

"Tied to the kitchen table," she informed me, and went on with her thinking aloud. "You've dealt a hand that—"

"Yeah," I said sourly, "I'm another Papadopoulos."

Her big body suddenly quivered. Pain clouded her handsome brutal face. Two tears came out of her lower eyelids.

I'm damned if she hadn't loved the old scoundrel!

It was after eight in the morning when I got back to the city. I ate breakfast and then went up to the Agency, where I found the Old Man going through his morning mail.

"It's all over," I told him. "Papadopoulos knew Nancy Regan was Taylor Newhall's heiress. When he needed a hiding place after the bank jobs flopped, he got her to take him down to the Newhall country place. He had two holds on her. She pitied him as a misused old duffer, and she was—even if innocently—an accomplice after the fact in the stick-ups.

"Pretty soon Papa Newhall had to go to Mexico on business. Papadopoulos saw a chance to make something. If Newhall was knocked off, the girl would have millions—and the old thief knew he could take them away from her. He sent Barrows down to the border to buy the murder from some Mexican bandits. Barrows put it over, but talked too much. He told a girl in Nogales that he had to go back 'to Frisco to collect plenty from an old Greek,' and then he'd return and buy her the world. The girl passed the news onto Tom-Tom Carey. Carey put a lot of twos together and got at least a dozen for an answer. He followed Barrows up here.

"Angel Grace was with him the morning he called on Barrows here—to find out if his 'old Greek' really was Papadopoulos, and where he could be found. Barrows was too full of morphine to listen to reason. He was so dope-deadened that even after the dark man began to reason with a knife-blade he had to whittle Barrows all up before he began to feel hurt. The carving sickened Angel Grace. She left, after vainly trying to stop Carey. And when she read in the afternoon papers what a finished job he had made of it, she tried to commit suicide, to stop the images from crawling around in her head.

"Carey got all the information Barrows had, but Barrows didn't know where Papadopoulos was hiding. Papadopoulos learned of Carey's arrival—you know how he learned. He sent Arlie to stop Carey. Carey wouldn't give the barber a chance—until the swarthy man began to suspect Papadopoulos might be at the Newhall place. He drove down there, letting Arlie follow. As soon as Arlie discovered his destination, Arlie closed in, hell-bent on stopping Carey at any cost. That was what Carey wanted. He gunned Arlie, came back to town, got hold of me, and took me down to help wind things up.

"Meanwhile, Angel Grace, in the cooler, had made friends with Big Flora. She knew Flora but Flora didn't know her. Papadopoulos had arranged a crush-out for Flora. It's always easier for two to escape than one. Flora took the Angel along, took her to Papadopoulos. The Angel went for him, but Flora knocked her for a loop.

“Flora, Angel Grace and Ann Newhall, alias Nancy Regan, are in the county jail,” I wound up. “Papadopoulos, Tom-Tom Carey and Jack Counihan are dead.”

I stopped talking and lighted a cigarette, taking my time, watching cigarette and match carefully throughout the operation. The Old Man picked up a letter, put it down without reading it, picked up another.

“They were killed in the course of making arrests?” His mild voice held nothing but its usual unfathomable politeness.

“Yes. Carey killed Papadopoulos. A little later he shot Jack. Mickey—not knowing—not knowing anything except that the dark man was shooting at Jack and me—we were standing apart talking—shot and killed Carey.” The words twisted around my tongue, wouldn’t come out straight. “Neither Mickey nor Andy know that Jack—Nobody but you and I know exactly what the thing—exactly what Jack was doing. Flora Brace and Ann Newhall did know, but if we say he was acting on orders all the time, nobody can deny it.”

The Old Man nodded his grandfatherly face and smiled, but for the first time in the years I had known him I knew what he was thinking. He was thinking that if Jack had come through alive we would have had the nasty choice between letting him go free or giving the Agency a black eye by advertising the fact that one of our operatives was a crook.

I threw away my cigarette and stood up. The Old Man stood also, and held out a hand to me.

“Thank you,” he said.

I took his hand, and I understood him, but I didn’t have anything I wanted to confess—even by silence.

“It happened that way,” I said deliberately. “I played the cards so we would get the benefit of the breaks—but it just happened that way.”

He nodded, smiling benignantly.

“I’m going to take a couple of weeks off,” I said from the door. I felt tired, washed out.

