

Deadlock

Doc Turner, #1

by Arthur Leo Zagat, 1895-1949

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ANDREW TURNER had neither youth nor strength of body to aid him in his battle against the ugly power that had laid grim hold on Morris Street. But he had a far more deadly weapon—the sort of courage that will die trying!

POLICEMAN Tim Healy poked his nightstick glumly at the jamb of the drugstore door. "Listen," he muttered, avoiding the white-haired pharmacist's eyes. "That fish-faced dick, Stockton, is just after bringing Ange Liscio in."

The smile vanished from Andrew Turner's eyes, and his lips were straight-lined, grim. "No!" His voice was sharp. "Ange is a good boy. I'll swear he has done nothing wrong."

Healy stared at the syrup stains on the little man's alpaca coat. "Stockton found a hot ring in his pocket, a two-carat diamond that was on the list of stuff swiped from Battista's jewelry shop last week." His florid face was expressionless as he went on in a monotone. "Some rat of a stoolie tipped the shoe-foot off, *he* says. Dumb stunt for Ange to be carryin' it on him like that."

"Very stupid. And the kid doesn't lack brains. Far from it." He rubbed a smudged spot from the glass with an acid-stained thumb. "It doesn't sound right, Tim. I've known the boy since I sold his mother nipples for him to suck on and he has always run straight. Mischievous of course, but fundamentally decent and honest. Best of the lot around here."

"Right! An' he's sure took good care of old Maria an' her brood since Tony kicked off." Healy's mouth twisted bitterly. "But it's the old story. What chance has he got? No money to hire a decent mouthpiece an' the D.A. hot after a conviction. It'll be assigned counsel fer him, an' you know what that means. Beside, somethin' tells me the case against him's goin' to be air-tight." Hidden meaning seemed concealed in the rumble of that last sentence, and Turner's head jerked up.

"Oh," the druggist said, softly. "So that's it!"

Two white spots appeared on either side of his flaring nostrils and his eyes were agate-hard as they peered up into the policeman's. Some wordless communication passed between the two, some telepathy born of the long years through which they had watched together over the poverty-stricken families of Morris Street.

"Perhaps someone will find Ange Liscio is not quite as friendless as he appears." Very calm, his tone, almost inflectionless. But there was quiet menace in it, a cold threat in strange contrast to the shabby, slight form of the man.

"Well, I've got to be gettin' on." Tim Healy moved ponderously into the rain. His club swung idly by its thong, but on his weather-seamed countenance there was an odd look of satisfaction that had not been there before.

FOR a long minute Doc Turner stood in the doorway of his store. Before him stretched the bedraggled, rubbish-strewn length of the street to which he had come more years ago than he cared to think. There had been pleasant gardens all about then, and little houses set well back from flower-bordered roads. Now Morris Street and its vicinity was a slum, a teeming warren of swarthy-skinned people whose English was broken and whose eyes were still slightly bewildered at the strange customs of an alien land. Meek eyes that had learned to look to the white-haired druggist under the "L" for advice and help in the physical and mental illnesses of those curious beings who were their children. They were his children, too, the only children he had ever had. And he had been content, happy in serving them.

But of late a shadow had fallen across Morris Street that was blacker than the shadow of the long-legged "L". Young men and women coming in to buy their

shaving creams and lipsticks were pasty-faced, fumbling-handed, noisy. Not gay, but feverishly boisterous, while an unnatural light gleamed in their big-pupilled eyes, and their fingers scratched continuously at inflamed nostrils. One or two drug-takers there had always been. But now the disease was spreading like a plague. All Doc's probing brought him nothing but the certainty that an organized group was debauching his people, a band directed by some shadowy overlord who was utterly depraved, utterly merciless.

Federal officials and the police made raid after raid, netting shifty-eyed, slinking individuals by the handful. The peddlers. But these were quickly replaced, and the traffic went on, growing insidiously. Somehow the authorities could not, or *would* not, reach the main spring of the evil. After all these were only Wops, and Kikes, and Micks on Morris Street. It didn't much matter what happened to them.

No need for the old druggist to concern himself with all this. He was only a shopkeeper. But these were his children, remember. His children!

A long train thundered by overhead and Doc moved. He did a curious thing then. From a shelf midway down the store he took a bottle of Nastin's Coughex. Sliding open a panel in the show-window backing he placed it meticulously near a pyramid of hot-water bottles. From the outside it would be almost hidden, surely unnoticed by anyone not looking for it. He slid back the panel and turned away.

"Abe," he called. "Abe, get your cap!"

From the mysterious back precincts of the store came a piping response. "Yez, Meester Toiner?"

"Go up to Two-twenty-one, top floor, rear. Tell Mrs. Liscio I want to see her right away."

THE door had scarcely closed behind the boy's scampering form when it opened again to admit a barrel-bodied, long-armed young man whose red hair was uncovered, and whose grease-smearred overalls were powdered with rain. There was black grease across his broad-planed face too, but it could not hide the strength in his square jaw, nor the determination in his gray eyes. Those eyes flicked around the store, registered satisfaction at finding it empty of all save the proprietor.

"Quick work, Jack," the druggist was saying. "How come?"

"Slow at the garage so I slipped out to the Greek's for a cup of coffee. Saw you putting out the Nastin's and came right over. What's doing?"

"Nothing yet. You're too early. But I have a feeling there's a busy night ahead for us."

Jack's eyes glowed. "Then you've got trace of something at last!"

"Maybe." Turner was ruminative. "Ange Liscio has been arrested for burglarizing Battista's store."

The other gave vent to a long whistle. "Ange! He's the last one I'd think would..."

"Go crooked. He hasn't. He is being framed."

"Why the devil would anyone want to frame him?"

"Precisely what I want to find out. Someone wants to get rid of him. I want to know who, and why."

The younger man picked up a comb and rasped his thumbnail along it. "His bunch has kept clear of the snow, and I happen to know it's his doing."

Doc pulled at his lower lip. "The devils aren't satisfied with the damage they've done already. He's in their way and they're railroading him. Does that make sense to you?"

A tense excitement quivered in Jack Ransom's voice. "Damn good sense, Doc. But how does that give us a track to the number one devil we're trying to spot?"

"I have a hunch he knows—but here comes his mother. Get behind quick and keep your ears open."

Jack Ransom dived into the back room, and the overflowing form of Maria Liscio filled the doorway. A black shawl framed her work-worn face, covered all but the rough-red fingers of her hands. Her little black eyes were reddened with weeping.

"Hello, Marie. How are all the bambinos?"

The woman's lips trembled. "Bambino's alla right. Boot my Ange..."

"Time to go home, Abie," Turner interjected to the open-mouthed errand boy. "Skip!"

"Aw chee!" He slid out, grumbling. His employer turned back to Mrs. Liscio.

"What about Ange?"

"He's arrest'. Da policea come for heem, say he steal. Mio Angelino, heesa no steal, Meester Doc! Heesa gooda *figlio*. Why da policea taka heem away?" Her hands waved helplessly, and tears squeezed out from beneath her granulated lids. "Whach I do weetout Angelino, weetout he bringa home da mon' for da eat, for da rent? Heesa got gooda job, no have to steal."

"I am sure he is no thief, mother." Turner tried to calm her. "Perhaps I can do something for him if you will help me."

"Whach you wanta? An'ting, an'ting you want I do."

"I just want to know if your son was in trouble of any kind, if anyone was bothering him."

A veil seemed to drop over the woman's face, through which her eyes peered blankly. "Whach you mean, bodder heem? Ange no bodder nobod', nobod' bodder heem."

He turned away. "All right, Maria. If you won't help I can do nothing. Go on home."

A retching sob burst from the woman's throat, and she clutched his sleeve. "Mees-ter Doc! Meester Doc! Not be mad weeth me. I tella. I tella." Mother love had conquered racial reticence.

"That's better. Out with it."

"Two hour 'go man come. Ange he getta pale when ope' door. Tella me go eenside. After while I heara both yell loud. I 'fraid they fight, grabba broom an poosh door ope' little beet. Angelino look so white, an' hees eyes burna. He say, 'For lasta time I tella you I no sella your feely stuff, no letta my boonch sella it. An' if you no leava me 'lone I tella whach I know.'

"Man standa too. Talk come from heem like ice, so colda, so slow. 'Yeah,' he say. 'You squeala, huh. Mebbe. Worka damn queek, Wop, or you no getta da chance.'

"Ange say, 'Betcha my life I worka damn queek.' Man slam door. Ange call me, 'Mom, I go drug store telephone somebod'.' He takea hat, somebod' knocka. Eet dot detecatife, dot Stockton. 'You want, Liscio,' he say. 'Whach for? You find outta. Come 'long.' An' he takea my Ange 'way."

TURNER'S hand fisted, and white spots showed along the knuckles. "Ever see that first man before, mother?"

She spread hands wide. "No! Boot I knowa heem 'gain. Hees got crook' finger, so, on righta hand an' nail ees black."

"Hmmm. Twisted index finger on his right hand, and a black nail. That's something. All right, Maria. Get back to your bambinos."

Before the woman was out the pharmacist had already joined Ransom in the prescription room. "Well?" he questioned. "What do you think of that? I was right, but we haven't got much to work on."

"Look, Doc!" Jack splurged out. "I seen that guy—tonight. A Caddy stopped for gas and oil at our pump and I noticed that finger on the driver. Big guy he was, with a nose mashed down against his mug and a cauliflower ear. A pug or I miss my guess."

"A pugilist, eh? I don't think he's the one we're hunting."

"No. But he's one step nearer the head of the thing. One step further than we've gotten before!"

"That's true. Did you get the number of the car—anything by which we can trace it?"

Ransom's face fell. "No. It was a V8 sedan—black—there's lots of those coming through from the ritzy coops on Garden Avenue. But Ange must know who he is. We'll get it from him. I..."

The sound of a door being opened came back to them, and Jack's spate of words checked. There was a spatter of footfalls outside and Doc went out through the curtained doorway.

The man at the counter had a black derby canted back from his forehead, but his mouth was a straight, cruel line and his eyes two hard balls. His lips hardly moved when he talked. "Turner! I've got something to say to you."

"Say it then, Stockton." There was no warmth in the druggist's voice.

"I'll say it all right. You lay off my business or you'll regret it. You're getting to be too much of a buttinsky around here."

"I don't know what you are talking about."

"Cut that!" the dick snapped. "You've just had Liscio's old lady in here for one thing, cooking something up. Lay off, I'm telling you. There's a lot of dope floating around here and it might be coming from a drug store. Understand?"

Turner's eyes were suddenly bleak. "I understand. You'll frame me like you've framed poor Ange."

No expression came into Stockton's face, but his derby jerked on his scalp. "One more crack like that," the words dripped from his immobile lips. "And I'll let you have it." He wheeled and moved across the floor. At the door he turned again. "As for the Dago," he squeezed out. "You can quit worrying about him. He hung himself in his cell ten minutes ago." The door banged, and he was gone.

"God!" A grayish pallor spread over the pharmacist's wrinkled face. He fumbled around to Ransom, who had come out. "Jack, did you hear that?"

"The poor fellow," Ransom groaned. "He took the easiest way out. The disgrace..."

"No!" Turner's fist banged down on the counter. "He never did it. His religion meant too much. Nothing would have made him take the life God gave him. Nothing in the world!"

"Then you think..."

"I don't dare to say what I think. Ninety-nine per cent of our police force are decent, devoted fellows. But the other one per cent..."

Ransom's face worked. "That couldn't have happened to a swell from Garden Avenue."

"Well, his mouth is stopped. We won't find out anything from him." Despair muted the old man's voice. Then he wheeled to a sound. "Abe! What are you doing here?"

The errand boy was sidling silently in. Mud splattered his thin cheeks and was thick on his clothing. His mouth corners drooped with weariness. But his eyes danced, and there was a little swagger in his walk very different from his usual stoop-shouldered slouch. Without answering his employer he peered into the vacant telephone booth, glanced furtively behind the counters. Then he tiptoed close to Turner.

"Are ve alone?" he whispered mysteriously.

"What's all this, Abie?" Despite his perturbation the druggist was forced to smile at the boy's antics. "What kind of a game is this?"

"Eet's no game, Meester Toiner. Eet's serious beesness."

"Good Lord, Abe, stop fooling around! Can't you see Mr. Ransom and I are busy?"

"Eet's vat you vorry about dot's my beesness. I got inflammation for you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I know vare comes from de guy mit de black nail. Abie, de boy detecatiff, dot's I'm."

Ransom and Turner exchanged glances of consternation. "What do you know about a man with a black nail?" Doc exclaimed.

"Vot dunt I know! You send me away, baht I got it, the key to the cellar, und I know dere's a hole in de floor. I go downstairs und leesten vot you talk mit Angie's mommer."

"You confounded brat!"

"So I hear vot she says," the lad went on, unabashed. "Und I teenk de boss would like to find dat guy bad. Eet's late und my mommer vill vorry so I start to go home, but foist I moost go een Ginsberg's delicatessen around de corner for a half a quarter salami. Und vot you teenk I see dere?" Abe paused and laid a mysterious finger along his muddy nose. "Vot you teenk, hah?"

"Oh, spit it out," Ransom growled. "Spill it."

"I see a beeg guy mit a busted feenger vot's got a black nail talkin' on de telephone! So I take a bite from a leeverwurst und leesten. 'Stockton,' he says een sooch a voice like a dog barks. 'Stockton, dot droogist ees got de Wop's dame in hees store. Get beesy.' Den he hangs up and goes oud.

"So I vatch trough de vinder und see him get een a Cadillac. Eet dunt start so kveek und I got time to valk oud und get on de luggage shelf een back. Oi, vass dot uncomfortable!" Abe wriggled a hand around to the small of his back. "Sooch a pain I got."

"Never mind the pain." The two oldsters were more than interested now. "Where did he go?"

"Denks Gott not so far! Ofer by dot Moorish Arms on Garten Avenoo. He parks dere und goes eenside."

"Great, Abie! You're one first class detective. We ought to be able to find out whom he went up to see, though it will be a little ticklish. The doormen over there are not very talkative."

"Teeklish?" The youngster shrugged expressively. "Maybe by you ees teeklish, baht by me is Yeedish. A Yeedish head. Alretty I know dot."

"Holy Moses! You don't mean to say you found that out too!"

"Und vy nod? I unscrew a hub cap, vait a meenit, und den valk een de lobby. De Roosian cheneral makes a snoot at me, baht I say, 'Meester, dees fell off from dot Cadillac up de stritt. Maybe you take me to de guy vot owns eet so he should geef me a neekel, hah?'

"Baht he vants de neekel fer heemself, de *Momser*. He says, 'Geef eet to me und I vill retoin it to heem,' und he snatches eet from me. Den he keeks me out."

"Then you didn't find out whose it was!"

"No? Aind you always said I got beeg ears? De cheneral geefs eet to de captain vots runs de elewator und says, 'Take dees up to Mr. Logan, in feefteen A.' "

There was a pregnant silence. Then, "Good boy. Oh, good boy!" Doc Turner said softly.

"Logan!" Jack Ransom's voice was vibrant. "I'll be damned! Wendell P. Logan, President of the Morris Street Settlement House!"

"Yes. W. P. Logan. The 'Big Brother of Morris Street.' I understand now. He can have all sorts of odd characters calling on him and no remark would be passed..."

"And the House makes a swell recruiting station for him! The damn sanctimonious—But what can we do about it? He's got all kinds of drag, that bird."

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute! I have an idea!" Turner drummed on the counter with his thin, almost transparent fingers, while the others watched keenly. Then—"Jack! Is that thing you were working on finished?"

"Huh! Oh the—Yes, all but two connections that'll take me three seconds to solder."

"Fine! Do that, and get back here with your flivver quick as you can make it. We're going calling. Listen—" There was a minute's whispered conference.

"It may work!" Ransom said slowly. "But I don't know."

"Afraid?"

"Afraid hell! With my brother over on the Island, screaming for the snow that devil taught him to use. I'd go through hell to get him."

"Then get busy. I'll close up, meantime. It is only ten o'clock, but there isn't much doing on a rainy night like this."

TWENTY minutes later, the gold-braided dignitary who presided over the entrance to the Moorish Arms advanced haughtily to greet a white-haired, white-mustached little man who came briskly through the ornate portal. The cuffs of the visitor's overcoat were frayed, his felt hat battered and stained, but there was a

peculiar dignity about his diminutive person that won from the lobby-man a grudging deference. "Yes, sir?"

"I wish to see Mr. Wendell P. Logan."

"Have you an appointment, sir?"

"Yes. I telephoned him ten minutes ago that I was coming."

"Very well, sir. The elevator is in this direction."

The mirrored door to the lift-shaft slid shut behind Doc Turner. The doorman turned away—to see Abe, ferret-faced and eager-eyed, standing just within the glass- and wrought-iron gate.

The door of apartment 15A opened to Doc Turner's ring. Wendell Logan's black, almost clerical garb could not conceal the power in his huge frame. His mouth was unsmiling under his close-clipped, grizzled mustache. "Mr. Turner, I believe," he rumbled. "You are prompt. Come in, sir."

Andrew Turner was smaller, meeker and more inoffensive-looking than ever, in a big club-chair in Logan's study. He held his hat on his lap and fingered the brim nervously. His host pushed an open box of Hoyas across the heavy table. "Smoke?"

"Don't mind if I do." Turner fumbled a cigar out of the box, made a little ceremony out of lighting it. "Isn't often I get a chance to puff one of these. Nasty weather, isn't it." He shivered. "There seems to be a draft through here. Mind if I shut the door?" Without waiting for a response he slid out of his seat and did just that. Then he was back. Logan glowered.

"You told me over the telephone that you had something of importance to discuss with relation to the Settlement House, something that could not wait till tomorrow."

"So I did. So I did."

"Well, what is it?"

Doc licked his lips. "Fact is, I deceived you."

The other's beetling eyebrows arched. "Indeed."

"Yes. I had to see you tonight, but it wasn't about the House. I—I am in trouble, Mr. Logan. I need help."

"Help? From me? Why—what..." The big man tried to throw surprise into his voice, but there was just the slightest thread of gratification.

"Financial help. Er—I own the drug store on Morris Street..."

"Turner's Pharmacy. I remember noticing it. You have been there a long time, Mr. Turner."

"A very long time." The druggist sighed. "The neighborhood would miss me."

"Is there any prospect that it will have to?" Logan was politely interested, no more. But there was a tiny glow in his cold eyes. "You are not ill, I hope."

Doc's eyes flickered to an almost imperceptible scratching at the door, and he spoke more briskly. "Not physically, Mr. Logan. But I might as well be. I have a mortgage-note for three hundred dollars due tomorrow and I haven't the money. If it is not paid, I shall lose my store."

"Ah! I take it that is the aid you want from me."

"I thought—that is—you have been so interested in charitable work on Morris Street—my store has been an influence for good there. The people rely on me. It

would be in line with your fine work..." He maundered into an embarrassed silence.

Logan shifted a desk-phone with long, strong fingers. "You come to me as a last resort, I imagine, quite without hope." He seemed to reach some decision. "I may surprise you. I may lend you the money you require—on condition." He repeated it softly. "On condition."

The pharmacist was immensely relieved. "Thank you. I..."

"I said on condition. You must confine your energies to your business hereafter. I am more familiar with your affairs than you imagine. Your troubles come from your neglect of your own interests for other matters. Your motives are praiseworthy, no doubt—but you cannot make money in—philanthropy."

Curiously enough Turner betrayed neither surprise nor indignation at this demand. "I can't make money in that store anyway," he said in a dull, hopeless tone. "If only I could find some other source of income. But at my age... I'd do anything, anything. I cannot work much longer and the poorhouse is staring me in the face." His voice lifted, at the last, and it was edged with hysteria.

Logan's hand tightened on the table-edge. "Do you mean that?" he boomed. "Do you mean that you would do literally anything?" His rumble dropped to a whisper. "Even something—outside the law?"

The old man threw his hands wide, despairingly. "I've devoted my life to those people, and I am a pauper. *I must take care of number one now, before it is too late.*" His eyes rose to the other man's, caught and held them. "I had ideals once. Perhaps you had them too."

A subtle change came over Logan's expression. Evil somehow leered in the very lines of the face that had been so benign instants before. "Ideals," he mouthed. "Ideals put no dollars in your pocket." He swept a hand around the luxury of the oak-paneled room. "Would I have this if I had—ideals?"

"You needed opportunity too," Turner said heavily. "Opportunity..."

"Opportunity! Bah! I made my own opportunity—and I'll make yours too." The game was in the open at last! "Look here, old man!" He leaned across the table. "I'll make you rich in a year if you'll play with me."

The white-haired druggist was trembling. "You mean it!" he exploded. "You mean it? How?"

"By handling my goods as only you could do! I've had my eye on you—the fools told me I couldn't touch you. Your location, your business, your reputation, are ideal! They'll never suspect you—and you know everyone in the neighborhood. You know whom to trust—they trust you... I'll get rid of the scum peddling for me now—I'll sweep them all out and..."

"Wait a minute! What are you talking about? What are these goods of yours?"

"Coke, man! Snow! White gold that makes men rich. Listen—the set-up is perfect. I'll supply you with the pure stuff in little packages, easy for me to transport. You'll spread it with milk sugar—five times—ten times—the suckers don't know the difference—make up the decks and pass them out at ten thousand per cent profit. They pay anything, anything for it once they get the habit. I'll attend to that." A big hand smashed down on the table. "Your fortune's made, man! And half my problems are solved!"

"Then—then you're the man..."

"Behind the coke selling on Morris Street. Yes! I am the man..." He checked, leaped to his feet. Something had crashed against the study-door! Logan got across to the door and pulled it open. Two threshing figures rolled in, locked in combat. A fist rose—Turner glimpsed a black nail on it—it crashed sickeningly against bone. The man underneath slumped and lay still. Red hair flamed against somber carpeting, but Jack's face was the white of death.

"That'll hold him fer awhile." A hulking form heaved up from the floor. Doc saw a mashed nose flat against a pitted face, and beady, glittering eyes.

"What's all this, Carl?" Logan snapped. "What's this?"

The pug was breathing hard. "I come in quiet-like, boss, 'cause Thomas downstairs told me you got comp'ny an' I sees dis gink humped up against the door here. He had a little black box..."

Logan whirled to Turner. His eyes were slitted, his face contorted with rage. Magically there was a gun in his hand, snouting at the druggist. "A black box, eh! So that was the game! A Dictaphone!"

DOC shrugged. "Yes, that was the game. You talked enough so that we had you in spite of all your influence. Your voice on that record and what you said... the Department of Justice would have done the rest." Color had faded from his cheeks, but there was no quiver of fear in the fatalism of his tone.

"It's the drug store guy, boss, from Morris Street. I piked him chatterin' ter the Wop's old lady, what the dick took care uv fer us. Ain't had time ter tell yen. This fool's been pokin' his nose..."

"In my affairs just once too often." The grizzled mustache lifted in a snarl. There wasn't anything clerical about Logan now. "Well, Mr. Nosy-body Druggist, you've made your last prescription." His automatic nosed at Turner threateningly.

"Go ahead. I'm old enough not to be afraid of death." Turner's voice was steady. "But how are you going to explain it to the police?"

"The police won't be too curious. You threatened me with kidnapping unless I paid a ransom. I defied you, and your confederate jumped in with a gun. I grabbed it from him, shot you. Carl came in just in time and overpowered the other fellow. He'll be sent up for life—and you won't know about it.

"All right, Carl. Get that Dictaphone in here. We'll get rid of that first, then we'll finish up with these fellows."

"Sure, boss." The thug went through the door. "Save me a crack at the carrot top Hey! What the hell?"

"What's the matter?"

"The dic—dicto—the black box! It ain't here."

Logan's face tightened. "Nonsense—you must have kicked it away as you fought. Look down the hall."

"It ain't here, boss. It ain't nowheres around!" Carl was back in the room.

"Poppycock. It must be! Here, hold this gun on him while I look."

"Aw boss. Let's plug this wise-guy foist. If I can't find it the cops won't. They ain't gonna search. We can take care of it later."

"Good idea!" Logan's finger started to tighten on the trigger. And a telephone bell shrilled through the room!

"Hell! What damn fool's calling me now?" Logan got the instrument to his face with his free hand, kept cold eyes on the momentarily reprieved Turner as he said, "Hello."

It was a new phone and Doc could hear the shrill metallic voice in the receiver distinctly. "Helloi," it said. "Ees dees Vendell P. Loigan?"

"Speaking. What is it?"

"I got it a black box here vot you're looking for."

"*What!*" Consternation leaped into the big man's face.

"I said I got it a box..."

"I heard you. Who are you and what do you know about a black box?"

"Dees ees Abie de boy detecatiff, und nefer mind how I know it about de box. Eet's ah funny box, eet talks. Leesten." There was a rasping noise, and then another voice scraped from the 'phone, a voice oddly like Logan's own; "...behind the coke-selling on Morris Street. Yes—I'm..."

"Shut that thing off! For God's sake shut that thing off!" Logan's face was livid. "Somebody might hear it!"

"Soooo vat?"

"Listen you. I'll give you ten grand for that thing. On the nail."

"Oi. Ten toisand he says. Undt vat shouldt I do it mit ten toisand dollars? Meester, de answer ees no! To you I dunt sell it."

"What do you want then? Twenty grand? Fifty?"

"Telephone numbers he talks! I'll told you, meester. Eeef ees still there mein chief Meester Toiner, und he talks to me, I do vot he says. Or else—veil I teenk maybe een de Departmentel from Justeece somebody might like it to hear the box talk, hah? ... Oi meester, sooch lang-vich! My mommer she wouldn't like it for me to hear dot."

His feelings slightly vented, Logan thrust the instrument into Doc's hands. "Here, you talk to him."

"Hello Abe. This is Mr. Turner."

"Oi, Meester Toiner!" The urchin's voice was suddenly choked with tears. "Oi'm denks Gott! I—I ditn't teenk maybe I vos een time. I seen dot gorilla come back und I vos so scared I teenk maybe I shook mein gold toot out. Baht vile he vos talkin' to de cheneral I found a vay trough de basement, und I got een de compartment yoost ven de screp started up. I grebbed de box ud run."

"Where are you now? No—wait—don't tell me!"

"Eet's all right I'm een your store mit de door locked und dot Irisher cop Healeh ouside mit hees gun in hees hand."

"Fine stuff. Now listen Abe. You tell Healy to get a taxi and the two of you take that box right down to the Department..." Logan's hand struck the 'phone from Turner's grasp.

"Damn it, I'll plug you if he does! So help me, no matter what happens, I'll blast you!"

Composedly Doc retrieved the telephone, spoke into it. "Just a minute, Abe." Then he lifted a pale, set face to Wendell. "What difference do you think that makes to me? A year or two less of life—against the chance to finish you and your devil's trade—it's the best bargain I've ever struck."

Logan stared at him. Then—"You mean it, by God! But I'll put the other bullet into your partner here, right through his heart!"

Doc winced. Ransom was young—had he a right to sacrifice him? He turned back to the telephone. "Abe. I've changed my mind. Logan is going to take us downstairs. He's going to get into Jack's flivver with us and drive to the store. You wait there and keep Tim Healy with you. If we get there in fifteen minutes you'll give the box to Logan and he'll walk home with it. If we're not there in exactly fifteen minutes from the time I hang up, don't wait a second longer but start off at once for the Department of Justice. Do you understand?"

"Oi. Und how!"

"Now start counting that fifteen minutes." He hung up. "How about it, Logan?"

"How do I know you won't go running to the D.J. with what you know?"

"You don't. You'll have to rely on my word. But there will be sealed affidavits in my bank's safe tomorrow morning that will be opened only if any—accident—happens to Abe, or Jack, or myself."

Logan dropped his gun in his pocket. "All right. You win."

"No. I don't win. It is a deadlock. But watch your step, Logan."

"I see your red-headed partner has come to. Let's get started."

THE coughing flivver grazed an "L" pillar and clanked to a stop in front of Doc Turner's drug store. The windows were dark—a shadowy figure stood statue-like in the dim doorway. "Tim!" Doc called and slid out to the wet pavement, watching Logan's slumped bulk as he did so. Until those affidavits were signed and deposited the man would be dangerous as a poisonous snake. Lucky that Abe had Healy here with his gun.

A cold voice behind him said. "Not Tim, Turner. Not Healy."

The druggist whirled, saw marble eyes under a canted derby, saw a thin-lipped mouth twisted in a mocking smile. "Stockton! Where's..."

"Healy? Flat-footing his beat. Good thing I was walking home with the skipper. The captain thought it swell of me to offer to relieve the cop, and ordered him back to patrol. What's going on? Who's in there?"

"I, Stockton." Logan's voice rang with relief, triumph. "These men stole something from me and have it inside. They're blackmailing me for its return." He clambered out. "The policeman was working with them. Lucky you're here to help me. You used your head and I won't forget it."

There was sly obsequiousness in Stockton's tone. "Thank you, Mr. Logan. Where's this thing they copped?" There was an automatic in his hand now. The safety clicked off.

"In the store."

The detective turned his fish-face to Doc. "Go in and get it. Then I'll take you to the house."

"No," Logan corrected, softly. "You will not arrest him. We'll take care of him and his friends right here. I like to pay my debts in person."

"O.K., sir. Hey you, behind the wheel, crawl out and come along."

Turner fumbled his key into the lock with icy hands. He had failed. He was too old for this sort of thing, Logan's organization was too strong.

The door opened and Stockton's weapon shepherded Jack and the pharmacist inside. There was no sign of the boy, but there was a sound of sobbing from the prescription room. "Abe, is that you?"

The urchin appeared, his face streaked with grimy tears. "Oi, Meester Toiner," he sniffled. "I couldn't help it. I couldn't get oud mit de box ven dees shamus sent Healeh away."

"Wipe your nose, Abie," Doc said mechanically. Then, "Never mind, you did your best."

They were certain to kill the youngster too, he thought wearily. No use appealing to them; they had no mercy, these men. A vision of the olive-skinned Ange rose up before him, hanging to a bar of a cell-door. Why did he ever permit the little errand-boy to get mixed up in this mess? "Where is it, son?"

"Een de back. On de table by the gallon goods."

"Quit stalling," Stockton rapped. "And get it. We ain't got all night."

Turner stumbled behind the partition, his old legs buckling under him. Logan and the detective crowded after him, but stopped just inside the entrance, where they could watch both him and the couple in the store proper. Stockton's right elbow was crooked and his finger was on the trigger of his gun. Doc got to the other end of the narrow space where a square box of black-painted wood, amateurishly put together, squatted on the work counter before an orderly row of gallon bottles. He hesitated, and his eyes went lovingly along the familiar labels that he would never read again. He read one, printed in scarlet.

"Snap it up, you. Get that box," Logan growled.

The pharmacist's gnarled hands reached out, trembling. But they stabbed past the box, seized a brown bottle with a wax-covered cork. He whirled and hurled the container, dropping to the floor as the bottle left his hand. Glass smashed at Stockton's feet, liquid splashed up, spattered over him, over Logan. A shot blazed past the point where Doc's head had been an instant before. Another. But the detective was shooting blindly, his eyes were closed and he was reeling.

Logan's hands were at his throat, his mouth gaped in a frantic struggle for air, his chest heaved spasmodically. The pungent odor of ammonia came back to Turner, his eyes streamed with its searing vapor, and he gasped wheezingly. But he squeezed out.

"Jack, grab him. Hold your breath and grab Logan."

Stockton turned and reeled out into the store. His weapon crashed and showcase glass shattered. Ransom dived past the staggering figure of the detective and his fist arched to the choking Logan's jaw. The cocaine seller crashed down into the pool of stronger ammonia, and white blotches appeared on his face, his hands, where the searing liquid burned into flesh. The outer door opened and Abe shrilled, "Moider! Police! Healeh, Healeh! Ah hold-up!"

The dick's gun cracked again, but there was the pow of a heavier weapon. A body thudded to the floor.

"Pull Logan out of that stuff," Doc husked. "And tie him up." He heaved to his feet, weakly, and getting another bottle from the shelf, poured a vinegar-odored fluid into the terrifically strong solution of ammonia. "This acetic acid will calm that down." He hopped across the mess and made his way to the front of the store.

Jack wound rope around Logan's feebly thrashing body. Stockton's head was pillowed on an outstretched arm as if he were asleep on the floor, but blood welled from a gaping wound in his chest. Abe leaned against a counter, his eyes rolling, his face green, Tim Healey's rubber-coated bulk loomed over the prostrate detective.

"Gee, Doc. What with the kid screeching an' this guy dashin' out blazin' away I thought he was a hold-up an' plugged him. Ain't that too bad?" Strangely there was a smile on Tim's face, a smile of grim satisfaction.

Andrew Turner's mustache twitched. "It was a natural mistake, Tim. The room was dark and you couldn't make out his face. The three of us will testify to that." Then his eyes went bleak. "It was an accident, just like Ange Liscio's hanging was suicide." A gurgle turned him back to the bound Logan, whose bloodshot eyes were just opening.

"As for you, Logan, death is too good for you. I am calling the Department of Justice now. You weren't square enough to stick to your bargain so I am released from mine. The deadlock is smashed, and you are smashed with it. There will be no more coke-selling on Morris Street."

