

A Cue for the Corpse

Ed Race

by Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951

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ED RACE heard the little bang while he was shaving, but he paid no attention to it. It might have been the back-fire of any one of the ten thousand cars passing on Broadway, eight floors below; or it might have been a guest in one of the other rooms committing suicide—or getting murdered. Whatever it was, Ed didn't intend to investigate.

There was a midnight show at the Clyde Theater tonight, and his act was due at one-ten. It was eleven-thirty now, and he wanted to dress and eat before he went on. So he finished shaving, and then went into the bedroom and put on his shirt and tie and vest.

Over the vest he strapped the twin shoulder-holsters containing the two heavy .45 caliber hair-trigger revolvers which he used in his gun-juggling and marksmanship act. Then he put on his coat and hat and turned out the light.

With the light out in the room, all the glittering incandescence of Broadway surged up through the window. Electric lights flickered and flashed from hundreds of huge signs. Two blocks down he could see the marquee of the Clyde Theater, where his own act was headlined:

THIS WEEK ONLY
THE MASKED MARKSMAN
THE MAN WHO CAN MAKE GUNS TALK!
IN PERSON!

Ed grinned at that. He was used to it now, though it had been a little thrilling for the first couple of years. It was ten years since he had first gone up in electric lights. And now he was the highest-paid performer on the Partages Circuit. He liked it. He liked to juggle those heavy guns, and bring down the house in thunderous applause when he shot out the flames of a dozen candles in succession thirty feet across the stage. Every night it was a new thrill.

He pulled open the door and started to step out into the corridor. But he suddenly stopped with his hand on the knob, and said in surprise, „Well, for the love of Pete!“

There was a girl in the hall, and she was lugging a dead man by the feet!

She was hardly more than seventeen or eighteen, and her figure was slender and supple in a thin silk dress. She must have put it on in a hurry, because, even in the dim light of the hallway, it was easy to see that she wore nothing at all underneath it. And she had no shoes or stockings on, either.

He stared.

She was dragging the man by the feet. His shoulders bumped along the floor, and his arms did a crazy slithering act on the wine-colored rug. He was on his back, and there was a large black hole in his left temple. The blood was dried around the wound. His eyes were open and glazed, and his jaw hung slack. There was no doubt that he was dead.

The girl apparently had dragged him out of Room 814 across the hall, because the door of that room was ajar. When she heard Ed Race, she dropped the man's feet as if they were scorching hot. Her eyes became wide and round. Her lower lip was trembling, and her small breasts were rising and falling with trip-hammer speed.

She stared at Ed Race without speaking.

Ed said gravely, „Why, you're only a kid. How come you're lugging a corpse? Don't you know you mustn't touch dead men till the police come?“

„I want to get rid of the body,“ she told him matter-of-factly.

„I guessed as much,“ he said dryly. „Who killed him?“

„I killed him.“

Ed raised his eyebrows. „With what?“

„With a gun.“

„Why?“ he asked.

„Because he was no good. He's a gunman—Lefty Mott. I'm—I was his gun moll. We had a fight and I shot him.“

Ed looked at her thoughtfully. „A gun moll, eh? Aren't you a little young to be a gun moll?“

„I'm twenty-five!“ she lied defiantly.

Ed grinned. „Twenty-five, eh?? A pretty ripe old age at that. Do you mind telling me what you were going to do with Mr. Lefty Mott?“

„I was going to put him in the incinerator,“ she said.

„There isn't any incinerator here. This isn't a housekeeping hotel.“

Her eyes widened. „But—but I thought every New York building had an incinerator.“

„You haven't been in New York long, have you?“ Ed asked.

„I have so! And I'm a moll, too. I'll prove it. Want me to prove it?“

„How?“

„Like this,“ she said.

She knelt swiftly beside the dead man, and thrust a hand inside his coat. She brought it out holding a huge automatic which she had taken from under the corpse's left armpit. It was so heavy she had to hold it in both hands as she pointed it at Ed.

„You do as I say,“ she blurted, „or I'll p-plug you like I plugged him. Get hold of his feet and pull him into your room!“

Just then they heard the clanging of the elevator doors around the bend in the corridor—and then voices, approaching. Two men were talking. One was whining, the other gruff and unyielding.

„I tell you, Inspector,“ Whiny was saying, "Inness plugged Lefty Mott right in his room. I seen him do it from my window across the street. He shot him in the head! And Lefty didn't even have a gun!“

The other voice was lower, but clear and authoritative. „All right, Gimp. We'll see for ourselves. There's an alarm out for Inness already. You better be giving me a straight steer, or it'll be just too bad for you!“

„Don't worry, Inspector. I know better than to try anything on you.“

There was only a grunt from the Inspector.

Ed Race didn't recognize the whiny voice, but he certainly did know that other, authoritative voice. That would be Inspector Hansen, Chief of New York City Detectives. Hansen was a hard man, brilliant and unemotional. He and Ed Race had never been able to get along together.

Ed looked at the girl, and saw that she was trembling. Her two hands were shaking so that the muzzle of the heavy automatic was wavering in a wide arc. If she fired it, she would be sure to hit anything but Ed. Also, Ed noticed with a grin, that she didn't even know enough to snap off the safety catch. But she was holding to her bluff. Her voice assumed a villainous whisper.

„Hurry up and drag this corpse in there, or I'll shoot!“

Ed said, „Well, well. I guess you've got me cold, sister.“ He whispered it so that the two men coming down the hall wouldn't hear. And then he took two steps forward, bent down and seized the defunct Mr. Lefty Mott by the feet, dragged mightily, and pulled him into the room.

The girl uttered a deep sigh of relief and ran in after him. Ed swung the door shut just as Inspector Hansen and his stool-pigeon came around the bend of the corridor. He left the door open just a crack, so as to get a glimpse of them. Behind him he could hear the girl's quick, labored breathing.

Hansen and Gimp passed right by his room and went directly to the open door of 814.

Ed watched, saw Hansen look in, then turn and scowl at Gimp, without saying a word. Gimp looked, in his turn, and exclaimed, „My Gawd, Inspector, I swear I seen Lefty Mott get shot in there. Someone must have taken him out!“

Hansen said, „Yeah. I suppose they took him out through the whole hotel, and then down in the street, and just loaded him in a car, while all of Broadway watched!“

Gimp shrugged helplessly. „Maybe they dragged him in some other room on the floor.“

Hansen snapped his fingers. „You may be right at that! I’ll call downtown and get some men. Then we’ll search every room.“

Very slowly and very carefully, Ed closed his door and locked it. He turned and faced the girl. She had heard what Hansen had said. She was staring at Ed, wide-eyed. She still held on to the automatic with both hands.

Ed smiled at her. „Well? You’ve got me in a nice jam now. When Hansen searches the floor he’ll find this body here and then he’ll arrest me for murder.“

There were tears in the girl’s eyes. „I—I didn’t want to do that to you. I—I only wanted to get rid of the body.“

Ed put out his hand and took the automatic from her. She didn’t resist. He turned it around and showed her the safety catch.

„For a gun moll, you certainly are ignorant of firearms,“ he said. „In the future remember, if it’s an automatic, it won’t shoot unless you snap this little doo-dad.“

He led her to a chair and sat her in it. „All right. Now suppose you tell me all about it. In the first place, I know you’re not a gun moll. In the second place, I know you didn’t kill Lefty Mott. In the third place, I know you’re in a lot of trouble. Maybe I can help you out.“

She sagged back helplessly in the chair, and looked up at him with a pair of hopeless eyes. „Nobody can help me. You heard what they said in the hall. That man, Gimp, lied. He told the Inspector that my brother—that’s Jack Inness—killed Lefty Mott. Well, Jack didn’t kill him. I found Lefty dead in Jack’s room, and I knew someone was trying to frame my brother, so I decided to drag the body out of there. I—“

She was interrupted by a heavy knock at the door. „Police Department!“ a voice rasped. „Open up in there!“

Ed whispered to the girl, „That’ll be Inspector Hansen. If he finds you here, your brother will be connected with the murder. All your trouble will be wasted. And if he finds me in here he’ll surely take me downtown for questioning, and I won’t be able to appear for my number at the Clyde Theater tonight.“

Her eyes opened wide. „You—you’re an actor?“

He nodded.

Hansen’s knock was repeated, this time more loudly. „Open up, I say! I know there’s someone in there. I know you’ve got a dead body in there. There’s blood on the door-sill here!“

The girl was on her feet in a panic. „What—what’ll we do?“

Ed leaped across to the closet, pulled one of his topcoats off a hanger, and threw it over her shoulders. „Put that on. You can’t go out in the street in that thin dress.“

He seized her arm, dragged her to the window. Hansen kept on knocking at the door. Now he was using the butt of his revolver. „Better open up. It’ll go hard with you, whoever—“

The rest of his voice was lost because, Ed had the window up, and had pushed the girl out onto the terrace, and was out after her. He closed the

window from the outside, leaving Lefty Mott in there all alone, in the majestic splendor of death.

The girl shrugged into the sleeves of the topcoat, and Ed led her all the way down to the end of the terrace. The next to the last window along the terrace opened on to the corridor near the freight elevator shaft. Ed slid the window up, crawled in, the girl following. They were around the bend of the corridor now, and they could hear Hansen still hammering at the door.

Ed grinned and said, „I hope my friend the Inspector doesn't get high blood pressure over there!“ He led her past the freight elevator doors to the fire-door. He pushed it open, and they both ran down the stairs to the seventh floor. On the seventh, Ed slowed up to a walk. He looked at the girl. „That's a man's topcoat you're wearing, but I guess it'll pass. Come on.“

He went to the passenger elevator shaft, and rang the down button. In a moment a cage arrived, and the door opened. Ed and the girl stepped in, and the elevator descended. The elevator operator said, „Hello, Mr. Race. What you doing on the seventh? I thought you was on the eighth.“

„I had to pick up Miss Smith here,“ Ed told him.

„You missed some excitement,“ the operator said. „Seems like there's been a killing up on your floor. There's a police inspector up there, and he's going through all the rooms.“

„Is that so?“ Ed said. „I wonder who killed whom.“ He took a ten-dollar bill out of his pocket, folded it into a small wad and gave it to the operator. „Look, Sammy, do you think this would improve or spoil your memory?“

Sammy peeked at the denomination of the bill, and grinned. „It would make me suffer from amnesia, Mr. Race!“

„Okay. Just forget you saw me and Miss Smith. Oke?“

Sammy winked. „Oke.“ Suddenly he became doubtful. „But if it's murder—they can give you the chair for being after the fact—“

„Don't worry, Sammy. I didn't do murder. Neither did Miss Smith.“

„Well, Mr. Race, if you was to make it twenty—“

Ed sighed and took out another ten-dollar bill. „All right, Jesse James.“

They were on the ground floor now, and Sammy grinned, pocketed the extra ten, and opened the sliding door. Ed stepped out, holding the girl by the arm. He started to cross the lobby, and then stopped, making a little grimace of disgust.

Three men had just come in, and were hurrying toward the elevators. „Those are Inspector Hansen's men,“ he told the girl. „Sergeant Bickert and two detectives. They'll tell Hansen they saw me coming out. And he'll learn that it's my room the body is in—“

The three men stopped directly in front of Ed and the girl.

Sergeant Bickert's eyes flicked swiftly over her, then swung to Ed. „Why hello, Mr. Masked Marksman. Fancy seeing you here—at a time when there's been a killing, too. Don't it beat everything how you're always around when there's a murder!“

Ed looked very innocent. „Murder, Bickert? Has some one been murdered in this hotel?“

Bickert was looking at him suspiciously. „Yeah. On the eighth floor. Might I ask, Mr. Race, what floor is your room on?“

Ed gave him a grin. „You might ask, Sergeant, but why should I reply? I have no intention of inviting you up for a drink. And now—“ he took the girl's arm

and started to push past the three detectives—„if you'll excuse me, Miss Smith and I have a little business to attend to.“

Bickert put out an arm to bar his way. „Just a moment, Mr. Masked Marksman. This Miss Smith here—what is she, some kind of a back-to-nature girl?“

Ed scowled. „What do you mean?“

Bickert snickered. „I've heard of people walking barefoot in the country. But—“ he shook his head sympathetically „she's gonna find it tough walking on the pavement without shoes or stockings!“

For the first time Ed remembered that the girl was barefoot.

„Miss Smith is a toe dancer,“ he said stiffly. „She's joining my act tonight. She dances with two candles in her hair, and I shoot the candles. She always walks barefoot, to perfect her toe dancing.“

„Well, well,“ said Bickert. „A toe dancer, huh? This whole business looks very interesting. Suppose we all go up to the eighth floor and talk to Inspector Hansen. I'm sure he'll be glad to see you.“

The sergeant put out a big ham-like hand and took the girl's arm. „Come on, Miss Toe Dancer. We're going up. And you, too, Race!“ He motioned to the two detectives and they filed into Sammy's elevator.

Bickert jerked his head at Ed. „You next, Mr. Masked Marksman.“

Ed said mildly, „You are really an unreasonable fellow, Bickert. I'm sure you'll never forgive me for this.“

He wrenched Bickert's hand off the girl's arm, then gave him a hearty shove which sent him hurtling into the elevator cage to collide with the two detectives. Then Ed winked at Sammy.

Sammy returned the wink and slid the door shut, cooping the three detectives in the cage. Then he sent the elevator up. Ed saw the indicator go to five before it stopped. He grinned.

„Sammy is a good boy. I owe him another twenty for that!“

In the meantime he was propelling the girl swiftly out of the lobby, and into the street. „We only have about a minute and a half start on Bickert and his boyfriends,“ Ed told her. „They're on the way down already!“

There was a police squad car parked at the curb, right alongside the NO PARKING sign in front of the hotel. It was the car that Bickert had come in. Ed looked for a cab, saw one cruising toward the hotel entrance, and started to hail it. Just then some one said, „In there!“

He felt something hard jabbing into his back. Two men had come up on either side of himself and the girl. One man was at his left, and it was he who was jabbing a gun into his ribs. Another man on the girl's right, had hold of her arm, and he was poking a gun at her out of the pocket of his topcoat.

The man next to Ed jerked his head toward a limousine that had pulled up just behind the empty police squad car. He was short and skinny, and he had wide, bulging eyes, and buck teeth. There were hundreds of people passing, but no one noticed the concealed guns in the hands of Bulgy-eyes and his companion.

Grace Innes was staring at Bulgy-eyes. „You—you were in my brother's room talking to Lefty Mott. You killed Lefty!“

„Snap it up!“ Bulgy-eyes snarled. „Or I'll let you have it, too!“

„Now isn't that nice!“ said Ed. He swung suddenly to the left, his elbow jamming the gun out of alignment with his ribs. And he continued that motion,

bringing his right fist all the way around to connect in a vicious smack to the side of Bulgy-eyes' head. Bulgy's gun exploded into the pavement, and he went cascading backward into a group of passers-by, clawing to regain his balance.

Ed whirled back to the right, snaking the .45 out of his left-hand holster. But he was too late. The other man had hustled the girl across the pavement and into the waiting limousine. Just as Ed turned, the limousine's door slammed shut and it spurted away from the curb with wide-open accelerator. For an instant, Ed caught a glimpse of a face at the back window of the fleeing car—a long, thin face with black hair parted slickly in the middle. It was a face he knew.

„Sandoval!“ he exclaimed, under his breath.

The limousine was out in traffic now. Another car came up behind it, and Ed couldn't shoot at the tires. The rest of Rick Sandoval's car, he knew, would be bullet-proof. And then the limousine was gone from sight, turning the corner into the side street.

There was a shout behind Ed, and he swung around to see Sergeant Bickert and his two detectives erupting from the Longmont Hotel. They had seen Ed and they started for him, but Bickert collided with Bulgy-eyes, who was just scrambling to his feet, picking up the gun he had dropped. A crowd of passers-by was surging around, all trying to keep as far away as possible from the guns in Ed's hand and in that of Bulgy—eyes. And in their efforts to escape, they impeded the progress of Bickert's two side-kicks, who were trying to get to Ed Race.

Ed seized the opportunity to turn and run. He kept his revolver out, and weaved through the crowd toward the Fiftieth Street subway kiosk. Men and women got out of his way and he raced down the steps. A local train was roaring into the station, but Ed didn't make for it.

He ran past the cashier's booth to the other stairway at the south end of the station, and mounted the steps two at a time. They brought him up at the southwest corner of Fiftieth. He looked across the street and saw a crowd gathered in front of the other kiosk. They were looking down there, apparently after the detectives who had pursued him, and someone in the crowd shouted, „He got away on the train!“

Ed grinned sourly and turned away. He headed west along Fiftieth Street. He wasn't by any means out of trouble. Hansen and Bickert could easily pick him up tonight when he went on the stage at the Clyde.

He had struck his chin out this time, for fair. There was no sense in it. A girl he had never seen before was in trouble. Her brother was involved in a murder. Rick Sandoval, New York's Number One Gambling Baron, was interested in it somehow. That was all Ed Race knew of the setup. And with that little knowledge, he was in it up to his neck.

Thus far he was guilty of hiding the corpse of a murdered man, aiding a suspect to escape, assaulting a police officer, and creating a disturbance on a public street. Inspector Hansen would throw the book at him. And he had to face the music.

Ed Race was too well known to just pack up and run away. Besides, he would never do that. Somehow, he was convinced that the girl and her brother were the victims of some kind of elaborate plot on the part of Rick Sandoval. All he had to go on was the fact that he had seen Sandoval's face for an instant in

the limousine. But when Hansen and Bickert picked him up tonight at the Clyde, he wouldn't be able to offer a word in his own defense.

He was half way down the block when he discovered that some one had fallen into step alongside him, at his left. It was a man of about thirty-five, with sharply chiseled features. He had a straight nose and thin lips, and a stubborn chin, and brown hair which was thinning a little at the top. He had his hat in his hand in front of him, and he raised the hat a bit to show Ed the snout of a snub-nosed automatic underneath it. The automatic was pointing at Ed.

„Just keep walking!“ he ordered grimly. „I want to talk to you.“

Ed Race sighed. This was the third time within twenty minutes that a gun had been pointed at him. The fellow looked hard and coldly efficient, so Ed kept on walking. His hands swung free at his sides, ready for a lightning flash to one of his shoulder holsters.

„Go on and talk,“ he said.

„Where did they take my sister?“ the man asked. „You fingered her for Rick Sandoval to grab. Well, you better cough up the dope. I want to know where Sandoval took her. In case you don't tell me quick, I'll give you a nice piece of lead in the stomach. And you know lead can't be digested.“

He spoke coolly, but Ed could see a deep burning desperation in his eyes.

„You're Jack Inness,“ he said.

Inness's lips curled. „Maybe you didn't know it! Don't stall. Where did Sandoval take Gracie?“

They were walking down the street just like two acquaintances conversing amiably. None of the passers-by gave them a glance. But the hat in Inness's hand came up a little, and the muzzle of the automatic centered on Ed's stomach.

„You sap,“ Ed told him. „I was trying to help your sister. She found a dead body in your room, and she dragged it out into the hall. The police came along, and I helped her get the body into my room just in time. Then I took her downstairs. Sandoval was waiting in the limousine, and they grabbed her.“

Inness's eyes widened. „A dead body! Who?“

„Lefty Mott.“

Inness cursed under his breath. „Lefty was my trigger man. They got him. And they figured to frame me for it!“

Ed Race looked disgusted and puzzled. „Your trigger man! My God, what is this? First a seventeen-year-old girl tries to convince me that she's a gun moll. Then some muggs of Sandoval's try to convince me they're tough guys. Then you come along and try to tell me you're a big shot, with a trigger-man of your own. If this is a comedy of some kind, I know one guy that isn't enjoying it, Lefty Mott. And you can't be such a big shot. Because I never heard of anyone named Inness in the rackets.“

Inness sighed, took the gun from under the hat and thrust it in his pocket. „I guess you're on the up-and-up,“ he said. „Maybe you never heard the name Inness. I didn't use it. But you've heard of *Gentleman Jack* English?“

Ed nodded. A sudden gleam of understanding came into his eyes. „I should have known. You used to run the gambling racket in this town. Then the Federal Government caught up with you on income tax evasion, and you went to Atlanta for three years. You were paroled just a few weeks ago.“

„That's right. I used the name of English instead of Inness, because I didn't want my sister Gracie mixed up in the rackets,“ was the reply. „Gracie thinks

I've been traveling in South America for the past three years. When I wrote her that I was back in New York, she came here from school to meet me. I didn't want her around, because I knew there was going to be trouble with Sandoval. Rick Sandoval—" Inness's lips twisted, „took over the racket while I was away. The mob went with him. Lefty Mott was the only one that stuck with me. It was Lefty that sent my sister Grace the letters and money from South America during the three years I was in the pen.“

„I see,“ Ed said slowly. „And Sandoval's crowd killed Lefty Mott in your room, so the police would arrest you for it. Even if you aren't convicted, it'll break your parole, and automatically send you back to the pen. And Sandoval will still have a clear field!“

Gentleman Jack English nodded bitterly. „When Grace showed up in New York, I acted like a sap and took a room for her right next to my own. I forgot that Sandoval had seen her picture lots of times in the old days, and would recognize her. She doesn't even know that her brother is Gentleman Jack English. I've kept her in a convent school all these years.“

„Something tells me,“ Ed said dryly, „that the girls in that school smuggled in a few detective stories on the side. She knew a lot about gun molls and burning bodies in incinerators—just the kind of stuff they get in some books.“

„I don't understand what Sandoval wanted to snatch Grace for,“ Jack English said. „He had me framed okay without that—“

„I'll tell you why,“ Ed said with a harsh note creeping into his voice. „Grace got a glimpse of the murderer!“

Gentleman Jack stopped short in his tracks. All the color drained from his face. „Then they'll kill her!“ he said, very low. „They'll surely never let her live!“

„If they kill an innocent little kid like Grace—“

Gentleman Jack Inness uttered a hoarse, tortured laugh. „You don't know Sandoval. He's running the rackets worse than I ever ran them. He'll stick Gracie's feet in a slab of concrete, and drop her in the river!“ There was a hot, mad light in his eyes. „God!“ he muttered. "All the things I used to do are coming back at me now. That boathouse I used to have on the Hudson, at Sixty-eighth Street—Sandoval's still using it. God help me, Race—I've done plenty of bad things in my time in that boathouse. And now—“ there was a sob in his voice—„it's my own sister's turn!“

He went to the curb, and waved wildly to a cruising cab.

Ed Race put a hand on his arm. „What are you going to do, Inness?“

Gentleman Jack's teeth showed in a snarl. „There's an alarm out for me for the murder of Lefty Mott. I can't ask the cops to help on this. I'm going up to that boathouse and take it apart myself!“

He jumped into the cab, yelled to the driver: „Foot of West Sixty-eighth Street!“

Ed Race exclaimed, „Look here, Inness, I'm going with you—“

But Gentleman Jack slammed the door shut in his face. „Nothing doing, Race. Stay out of this. It's my headache.“

The cab spurted away from the curb.

And just then, a radio patrol car came cruising past.

Ed Race saw it all from where he stood at the curb. The radio car contained a sergeant and a driver. Ed saw the sergeant stare into the cab where Inness was sitting. He heard the sergeant exclaim, „There's Gentleman Jack!“

The driver of the police car swung in to cut off the taxicab.

Gentleman Jack opened the door of the car, leaped out and started to run. The sergeant in the radio car deliberately raised his gun and fired once.

Gentleman Jack sprawled headlong on his face, with blood spurting from a wound in his back just over the heart.

Ed Race cursed softly to himself as he ran over to where Inness was lying on his face. The sergeant had also reached Gentleman Jack, and Ed helped him turn the dying man over on his back.

Gentleman Jack groaned. His lips were flecked with blood. He knew he was dying. His eyes swept past the sergeant, and locked with the staring eyes of Ed Race.

„I got what was coming to me. But Gracie—for God’s sake, don’t let her get it, too...“

Ed Race gulped. He pressed Gentleman Jack’s hand, and nodded an unspoken promise.

Inness smiled. He closed his eyes. His head dropped back into the sergeant’s arms. He was dead.

The sergeant looked at Ed. „What the hell was he talking about?“

Ed shrugged. „I wouldn’t know. I’m just a passer-by.“

A crowd was pressing close about them. Ed slid out inconspicuously to the edge of the crowd, and moved over to the taxicab out of which Inness had jumped. His eyes were bleak. „Foot of West Sixty-eighth Street!“ he said to the driver.

As the cab pulled away, Ed saw the police sergeant getting up from beside the dead body of Gentleman Jack Inness, and staring after him. The sergeant was just realizing that Ed Race had been more than an innocent bystander, that he must in some way have been connected with Inness. Several bystanders had heard Ed’s order to the cab driver, and Ed knew that the police would not be far behind him.

As the cab swung west, Ed stared ahead grimly. His word was given to a dead man. And even if he had not promised, the thought of innocent little Gracie Inness sinking helplessly to the bottom of the river with her feet buried in a slab of concrete, would have impelled him to go ahead. He knew that what he had to do, he must do alone. For at this moment he could not call upon the police. Inspector Hansen or Sergeant Bickert would cap him in jail first, and question him.

To send the police on a raid of the 68th Street boathouse would be equivalent to signing Grace Inness’s death warrant. For Rick Sandoval would be sure to see to it that she was the first to die. Sandoval and his gang could not afford to have her remain alive to identify the killer of Lefty Mott.

At 67th Street and Twelfth Avenue, Ed Race dismissed his cab, and walked a block north. He spotted the boathouse at once. It was a low, well— kept structure jutting out into the river. A sign across the door read:

SANDOVAL BOAT CLUB

Jack Inness had once owned all that property. Ed recalled hearing through underground rumor, that, when Inness went to jail, he had deeded all his holdings to Sandoval to administer for him. And Sandoval had immediately proceeded to double-cross his former chief and to use all this property as his own.

This same boat club had figured in the death of many a man who in the past had dared to defy the underworld rule of Gentleman Jack Inness.

Ed Race came to a stop directly across the street from the Boat Club. There was a single dim light at the side of the building, and he could see that a long, sleek cabin-cruiser was tied up at the dock alongside the low building.

Ed Race's eyes were bleak as he crossed the street. His hands swung low at his sides. As he reached the entrance of the building, a dark figure separated itself from the shadows, and barred the door.

„Hello, Butch,“ said Ed. The blood raced in his veins. Now he was sure that Gentleman Jack had not been mistaken. This must be where they had taken Grace Inness, otherwise why would Butch Halsey, Sandoval's personal bodyguard, be on watch here?

Butch Halsey had his hand in his coat pocket. „What you doin' here—Race?“

Ed smiled thinly. „Just going in to see Rick Sandoval,“ he said.

„Sandoval ain't here,“ Butch told him.

„I'll see for myself, thank you.“

Ed started to go in, and Butch barred the way. „Scram,“ he said. His hand came out of his pocket with a wicked little gunmetal automatic.

But he had no chance against Ed Race, whose exhibitions of lightning draws nightly amazed the audiences at the Clyde Theater. Ed's right hand streaked in almost imperceptible motion, and somehow as if by magic, a huge, long-barreled .45 was coming down in a short, wicked arc. The barrel smashed against Butch's wrist, and he dropped the automatic.

Ed was smiling casually, but there was a deadly glint in his eyes.

„Now,“ he said softly, „turn around and open that door and go in.“

Butch gulped. He was no longer the tough gangster bodyguard. He had no guts to buck a lightning draw like Ed's. „The—the door is locked,“ he gulped.

Ed's eyes rested on a bell alongside the door. „All right. There must be a signal to get the door open. Ring that bell properly.“

Butch hesitated for the space of ten seconds. He looked into Ed's eyes, and what he saw there made up his mind for him. Slowly he turned around and put his thumb on the bell button. He pressed it twice, then stopped, and pressed it three times swiftly again. Almost at once, a buzzer sounded. Butch pushed the door open. Ed took out one of his guns and nudged him in the back. Butch understood, and led the way down the dark hallway. There was a light at the far end of the building, and Ed urged the husky bodyguard ahead of him toward that light. They could hear voices inside. Someone called out, „Hurry up, Butch. Give us a hand with this!“

Ed and Butch reached the entrance to the room at the rear. The far end of the room had sliding doors which opened on to the pier. Three men were standing around the figure of Grace Inness. For a moment, as Ed looked at that tableau, it seemed to him that little Grace Inness was taller than any of the three men.

Grace Inness was not standing on the floor. Her feet were resting in a slab of concrete about three feet square and three feet high. They were buried up to the ankles, in the concrete. Rick Sandoval and two of his men were pushing the heavy slab out on to the pier. It was evidently their intention to get their victim on to the cabin-cruiser, take her out into the center of the river, and drop her over.

The gaunt face of Sandoval looked up at Butch, who was in the doorway in front of Ed Race.

„Come on, Butch,“ he called. „You have the shoulders for this.“

And then Sandoval saw Ed Race behind the big bodyguard. He uttered a shout of warning to the other two men, and dropped to the floor. A gun came into his hand. The other two men went to their knees behind the suddenly huddled figure of Grace Inness. Butch Halsey squealed as shots from their three guns came thundering at the doorway. They weren't worried about Butch.

Halsey took the first fusillade in his chest, and fell forward, leaving Ed alone.

Grace Inness was staring in Ed's direction, unable to move out of the concrete bed in which she had been encased. She was a perfect shield for Sandoval and the two gunmen. That is, she would have made a perfect shield against anyone except *The Masked Marksman*.

Ed Race stood spraddle-legged.

The two hair-trigger .45 caliber revolvers were in his hands, bucking and roaring as he fired carefully.

His first shot chipped an edge off the concrete block, sending the splinters into the eyes of one of the gunmen. The man dropped his gun and screamed.

Sandoval and the remaining thug kept on shooting. But they were not aiming. They were just triggering their guns in blind fear. Both of them knew who Ed Race was. They had seen *The Masked Marksman* on the stage.

They knew that if Ed could see only an inch of their bodies, he could hit that inch. So they squirmed close to the ground, pressing together behind the three-foot concrete slab, seeking all the protection they could. And from that position, their shooting was none too certain.

Ed saw a shoulder and fired once, hitting it. The gunman with Sandoval squealed and fell flat on the ground. Sandoval cursed, and raised his gun, pointing directly up at Grace Inness.

„Stop shooting, Race,“ he yelled, „or I'll kill the girl!“

Ed Race laughed harshly. All he could see of Sandoval to shoot at was the barrel of his gun jutting up from behind the concrete slab, and pointing at Grace. That barrel was no wider than a candle.

The two slugs whined through the air, converging upon that tiny target. The gun was smashed from Sandoval's hand, and went spinning across the floor. Sandoval cursed, and rolled over. In his left hand he seized the gun dropped by one of his men. But Ed Race had already leaped across the room toward the slab.

He pulled the trigger of his right-hand gun four times in quick succession. The four slugs smashed Sandoval's right wrist.

„Don't—shoot any more!“ he begged.

Ed's eyes glinted with a bleak light.

Abruptly, the sound of a police siren cut through the air outside, accompanied by the screaming of tires on pavement. In a moment, uniformed men flooded into the building, headed by Hansen.

Ed Race holstered his guns. „You can arrest me now if you want to, Hansen,“ he said dryly. „But I think you've got bigger fish for your net!“

He turned, just in time to catch the slumping body of Grace Inness as she fell.

„By God,“ Inspector Hansen exclaimed, „what's been going on here, Race?“

„Nothing much,“ said Ed. „Except that you’ve got Rick Sandoval cold for attempted murder. And when Grace Inness comes out of her fainting spell, she can identify the murderer of Lefty Mott. Now, you might get some pick-axes and chip this concrete off her feet.“

Hansen swore softly. He motioned to his men to find axes. Then he looked at Ed. „You shot it out with this mob?“

Ed nodded. „I had to do the job myself. You wouldn’t have given me a chance to explain.“

Inspector Hansen grunted. „Frankly, Race, I don’t like you. But I got to give the devil his due. You did a nice piece of work.“

„Thanks,“ said Ed, starting for the door. „I’ll be down at headquarters later, to sign a statement. In the meantime, take good care of Gracie. I’m going to see that she gets a good start in life—the kind her brother would have liked to see her get.“

„Hey, wait a minute!“ Hansen yelled. „Where are you going?“

„It’s one o’clock,“ Ed called back from the doorway. „I have a curtain call at the Clyde at one-ten—to put on an exhibition of real shooting!“

