

# **Amateur Night for Killers**

**Ed Race, #1**

**by Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951**

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*Meet Ed Race—detective extraordinary and vaudeville juggler supreme. But it looked like his last act when he tried to clean up the plague-spot that was Newbold City, and found himself alone on a blood-stained stage—with Death waiting its entrance cue!*

THE train pulled into Newbold City at nine in the morning. Ed Race walked out of the station with only a small overnight bag. The paraphernalia for his vaudeville act had gone ahead to the Newbold Theater, and his own personal luggage, including the six precious revolvers that he cleaned lovingly every single day, were probably already at the Coulter Hotel.

The overnight bag did not contain clothes. It held certain objects which he found advisable always to carry with him ever since he had become a private detective as a side line.

An expensive imported limousine awaited him outside the main entrance of the theater. A square-jawed, powerfully-built chauffeur touched his cap with deference. "Mr. Race, sir? Judge Hepley sent his car for you. I'll take you right over."

Ed Race eyed the chauffeur keenly. "That's funny. I thought the judge was going to keep my coming a secret from everyone."

The chauffeur shrugged. "The judge must have confidence in me, sir." He held the door open respectfully.

Ed cast a glance up the main street of the thriving little Pennsylvania city. He knew from the judge's letter that he ought to be extremely careful. Yet it seemed quite in character that Judge Hepley should send a car for him. He stepped into the limousine, and the door closed behind him.

Immediately, he knew he had been trapped! His swift glance showed him that there were no handles to open the closed windows, none on the inside to open the doors.

He had his gun out in an instant, raised the butt to shatter the window. There was a click, and steel shutters slid up to cover the glass, plunging the interior of the car in blackness. The limousine leaped away from the curb. There was the sound of smoothly meshing gears, and the car settled down to a swift, steady pace.

Kidnapped! Before he had a chance to get into this game of death that was being played in Newbold City, he had been snatched away. Judge Hepley had warned him in the letter that the people he was going to oppose were ruthless—swiftly efficient. Here was a sample.

Ed Race smiled ruefully. He should have known better. He was no novice. He held a license as a private detective in a half-dozen states, but he preferred to tour the country in a vaudeville circuit, doing a juggling act with forty-five caliber revolvers. The startling part of his number came when he juggled three guns at one time. As each gun came down into his hand he shot out the flame of a candle thirty feet across the stage. He was one vaudeville headliner that had no imitators!

He felt the speed of the car increasing, and he set to work. His fingers moved nimbly, opening the overnight bag. From among its contents he selected a midget acetylene torch, made by a clever machinist to his own specifications. In a moment he had donned a pair of goggles. He pressed the little spring-catch of the torch, and directed the sizzling, blue-white flame at a spot in the right hand door just above the lock. He traced a circle around the spot, watched the bullet-proof metal burn away under the flame. When the circle was completed, he struck it hard with the butt of his gun, and a round piece about twelve inches in diameter fell away. The door, minus its lock, was swung open by the rush of the wind as the swiftly moving vehicle careened along.

Ed replaced the torch and goggles, and closed the bag. Then he swung out on the running board. They were speeding through a mixed residential and shopping section of the city, and he could see a policeman directing traffic at the next crossing.

He edged along the running board till he was beside the driver's seat, and clung tightly to the door-frame with his left hand. With his right, he shoved his gun into the chauffeur's ribs below the armpit, and shouted above the wind, "Pull up, guy!"

The chauffeur turned a startled face, looked quickly ahead, watching the road. He grinned, showing discolored molars. "Go ahead and shoot, Race. Can you figure what'll happen to you if we crash—standing on the running board like that?"

They were approaching the intersection. Ed pocketed his gun, reached into the car, and yanked on the emergency! The car shrieked to a stop, skidding to a stop within a foot of the traffic officer.

Ed stepped from the running board, took out his gun. "Get out!" he rapped.

The chauffeur obeyed, with a quirked smile. He didn't seem especially perturbed. The traffic cop ran around the front of the car, tugging his gun out. "What the hell do you call this?" he shouted.

Ed showed his shield. "Take a look at the car. I had to cut my way out of it. I want to hold this guy for kidnapping."

The cop eyed the shield, grunted. "Kidnapping, huh? Hot stuff!" Then his eye lit on the chauffeur, and he gasped, saluted mechanically. "Lieutenant Barney!—I didn't recognize you."

The chauffeur frowned, trying to catch the cop's eye. A small crowd was gathering. Ed Race tensed. He jerked a thumb at the chauffeur, asked the cop, "Did I hear you call him *Lieutenant*?"

The cop shuffled. "Well—"

"Wait a minute," said the chauffeur. "Let's go where we can talk this over. No sense in havin' the crowd listen in. Pile in the car and we'll drive around the corner. You, too, Bauer, to make Mr. Race feel safe."

"Suits me," said Ed.

The traffic officer bellowed the crowd away, and the three of them got into the car. Barney took the wheel. Ed and the officer sat in the rear. The cop gaped at the hole in the door.

"No tricks," Ed warned. "Law or no law, I hate being snatched!"

Barney drove down three blocks, and parked before an open lot.

"All right," Ed suggested. "Now, what's it all about?"

"It's all about this!" Barney snarled. He twisted around to face them, stuck the ugly snout of an automatic over the back of the seat, pointing it squarely at Ed.

Ed's gun was hanging negligently between his knees. He sat still. Barney kept his eyes on Ed, but spoke to the cop. "Bauer, this guy has a reputation, but he's really dumb. Look how he played into my hands. Take him downtown and charge him with assault with a deadly weapon. That ought to hold him till we're through with our little business."

Bauer said, doubtfully, "Whose business, Lieutenant?"

Ed Race spoke quietly. "Look, Bauer, your friend Mr. Barney seems to be a police-lieutenant in disguise. But it looks to me like he's a crook. Are you going to back his play?"

Bauer appeared uncertain of his ground. "I don't know about this, Lieutenant. After all—"

"Forget it, Bauer," Barney snapped. "This is the Chief's business. You can take this mug downtown, or get broke!"

Bauer sighed. "Well, if it's the Chief's business—" He reluctantly took out his handcuffs. "Hand over your gun, you!" he growled at Ed.

Ed gingerly lifted the gun from between his knees, holding it by the barrel in his left hand. He extended it to Bauer, butt first. Bauer reached for it. Then Ed acted with the lightning speed for which he was famous on the stage. Apparently by accident, the gun dropped from his fingers. His right hand swooped out faster than the eye could follow, and caught the gun in midair. At the same time, his left hand reached up, gripped Bauer by the back of the neck in powerful fingers, and yanked mightily!

Bauer's body was pulled to the side, fell into Ed's arms. Barney cursed. He couldn't shoot now without hitting Bauer. The patrolman's face went white under Ed's punishing grip on his neck.

Ed's gun was trained on Barney. He said silkily, "If you will kindly put your gun down, Lieutenant Barney, or whatever your name is, and get to hell out of this car, I will appreciate it. I like your company, but I have places to go."

Barney growled, "This won't get you anywhere, Race. You're up against a big thing, here. If I don't get you, someone else will. Take my advice. Leave this town and forget about the Judge. It might even pay you to pass up your act at the theater tonight."

"Thanking you for your advice, I am yours very truly," Ed replied. "Now, get!"

Barney said, "O.K. But remember, I warned you." He let his gun drop to the floor and stepped out of the car.

"Now pull your friend out," Ed directed. Bauer was semi-conscious from the wicked grip at the nape of his neck. It was a deadly grip—one that could kill a man if used properly. Barney hauled the man out, supported him on the sidewalk, glaring at Ed the while.

Ed slipped into the driver's seat, shifted into gear and stepped on the gas pedal. He grinned into Barney's wrathful face. "I'm sure you won't mind my borrowing this bus," he sang out.

He took a right turn at the next corner, then zig-zagged in and out of a half-dozen streets, to make sure he shook off all pursuit. He estimated it would be five minutes before an alarm could get out. Well within that limit, with a minute to go, he abandoned the car. He took his little bag, boarded a passing trolley. When the trolley got to a busier section of the city, he got off, flagged a cab, and said, "15 Emmons Street. No objection if you snap it up."

JUDGE Sumner Helpey's home on Emmons Street was a modest, refined-looking two-story frame building. It was one of a row of better than average houses on the tree-lined street. Each had a plot of carefully-trimmed lawn in front, and a garage in the rear.

Ed said to the chauffeur, "Here's an extra dollar. Take that bag down to the Coulter Hotel, and leave it at the desk for Mr. Race."

"It's a pleasure, boss," said the cabby. "That's an easy buck, what I call."

When the cab left, Race walked up the narrow path, took the three porch steps in a leap, and pushed the button. He heard a bell jangle inside. As if his ring had been a signal of some sort, a gun was suddenly discharged within the house. The report reverberated through the building.

Ed turned the knob, and pushed. The door opened at his touch, and he tore into the hallway. There was scant light here, except for some stray beams that crept in through the entrance. To the left was an open doorway, leading to a library. Ed Race stepped through it. A portly, white-haired man sagged in the chair before the massive oak table. His head hung over the back of the chair at an unnatural angle. He was dead. He had been shot in the heart.

Ed sprang to the open window which looked on the driveway alongside the house. A man in a gray topcoat was sprinting around the end of the garage at the rear. Ed pulled his gun and fired in a single motion, too swift for the eye to follow. The man in the topcoat disappeared behind the garage, but Ed knew he had hit him. He knew just where. All he had been able to see at the moment of firing had been the right shoulder, and his slug had spanged there.

Ed vaulted the window sill, hit the cement driveway on a run. His long legs ate up the distance to the garage. His quarry had sped through the driveway of the house which backed on Judge Hepley's. He was just turning into the other street. Ed had no time for another shot. He sped through the driveway and just as he got out on the other street, saw a coupé pull away from the curb with a roaring motor. Ed raised his gun, aimed at the tires, but before he could shoot, his arm was grabbed from behind and someone hit him a terrific whack on the side of the head.

His head spun. He sagged, would have fallen, except that rough arms that caught him. Someone shouted in his ear, "What you think this is, a shootin' gallery?"

It was a uniformed policeman. Ed was weak but he kept his wits. As if by magic, his gun disappeared into one of his pockets. He rested heavily in the policeman's arms, giving his head time to clear.

Curious people were coming out of the houses along the street; a small crowd was gathering. Ed heard the cop say, "My club grazed the side of his head. He'll be all right in a minute."

Ed grunted and began to straighten up. He looked at the policeman. "So you're a cop, huh?" he growled. "Well, you did a fine job! Judge Sumner Hepley has just been murdered back there in his house! And you sock me just when I've got the killer in the bag! You ought to get a medal—from the murderer!"

"You don't say so!" the cop snarled. "Judge Hepley has just been killed, and you're trying to catch the murderer! Well, well! You couldn't be the killer, could you? Let's go back there and see what it's all about."

They started back through the driveway, the cop keeping a grip on Ed's arm. He called out to the bystanders, "Call Headquarters, one of you. Say there's been a murder, and that I got the guy. Me, Patrolman Joe Franz, Fourteenth Precinct."

JUDGE Hepley's house was already in a state of turmoil. Some of the neighbors had probably 'phoned about the shot, for a police radio-car stood before the door. Two policemen from the car were in the library.

A middle aged woman in a house dress and dusting cap was talking to them. As Patrolman Franz pushed Ed Race in before him, one of the two cops from the radio-car was barking at the woman, "Who are you? What's happened here?"

The woman could not take here eyes off the Judge's body. "Lord help us," she muttered. "The poor Judge!"

The cop shook her arm roughly. "Come on, speak up! What's your name?"

She looked up at him as if suddenly aware of his presence. "Mrs. Davis is my name," she snapped. "I'm the housekeeper." She looked at the body again. "Poor Judge, he had nobody to take care of him but me."

"Where were you when this happened?" the man in uniform rasped.

"Upstairs. I heard a shot and came down. I rushed in here and there was the poor Judge lying all bloody, and someone was climbing out of the window."

Just then she caught sight of Ed Race. Her eyes snapped. She lifted a gnarled hand and pointed a bony, accusing finger at Ed. "That's him!" she shrieked. "That's who I saw climbing out the window! He done it! He done it!" She shook her finger under Ed's nose. "You murdered him! What did the poor Judge ever do to you? Why did you kill him?"

"My dear Mrs. Davis," Ed smiled at her with his lips, though his eyes were grim. "Don't judge by appearances. Maybe if I tell you my name, it will mean something to you. I am Ed Race."

The woman uttered a strangled cry and put her fist to her mouth. Her eyes were wide with consternation. "What have I done!" she moaned. "The man who was to save my son! You're the one the Judge sent for!"

Just then the outer door opened. Patrolman Franz said, "That will be someone from headquarters."

Ed looked to the doorway and a slow grin spread over his face, for the man who entered was Lieutenant Barney, minus his chauffeur's uniform. He was dressed in plain clothes, and was chewing a tooth pick. Barney's eyes swept the room, taking in the body of Judge Hepley, flicking past Ed Race with no hint of recognition. "All right, boys," he said easily, "I'll take charge."

He walked to within a foot of Ed, asked, "This the murderer?"

Patrolman Franz nodded. "I caught him on Union Street. He was running away with a gun in his hand, so I pased him one."

"Well, don't just stand there!" Barney snapped. "Take out your gun and cover him! What do you think this is? A party?"

Franz complied, poking his gun into Ed's back.

Barney said, "What's your name? Remember anything you say may be used against you!"

"My dear Barney," said Ed, "your memory is getting bad. Less than a half-hour ago we were having a pleasant talk in your big car. And now you don't know me!"

The other regarded him coolly. "You're crazy, I never saw you before in my life. But just in case you feel funny, maybe this'll sober you!" His fist came up in a short swing and caught Ed in the mouth. The blow was intended to loosen a

couple of teeth, but Ed swung his head back easily and got nothing more than a cut lip.

One of the other cops jumped in and grabbed hold of Ed's other hand. The private detective strained forward, but Franz and the other cop held on to him grimly. Ed felt a trickle of blood on his chin. His eyes blazed bright at Barney.

Barney turned away with a grin, looked at Mrs. Davis. "Who's this?" he demanded.

"The Judge's housekeeper," Franz told him. "She saw this guy climb out of the window right after the shot was fired."

"That right?" Barney asked her.

Mrs. Davis was keeping herself calm with an effort. She looked Ed Race over closely. "On second thought," she said, "I guess maybe he isn't the man. Yes, I must have been mistaken. The one I saw didn't resemble this gentleman at all."

FRANZ spat disgustedly. "Hell," he exclaimed, "I just heard her identify him with my own ears. She's just covering him up now."

Barney shrugged. "I know her. It's her brat, Frank Davis, that's coming up for sentence tomorrow for the Wilson murder. Race is the guy they were getting to dig up new evidence to save the kid. It's only natural for her to try to shield him, but she'll change her tune downtown. We'll hold her as a material witness. By and by she'll get disgusted with that, and talk our way."

Ed licked the blood from his lips, said, "You seem to know a lot about things you're not supposed to know. I bet you have a dictograph planted somewhere in this house."

Barney grinned. "You'll find out we're not so dumb in this town—when you hang for murder yourself! Maybe we can fix it so you'll swing with this kid Frank Davis." Then to Franz, "Did you frisk him?"

"We didn't get a chance to."

"Well, do it! No, wait a minute! I'll do it myself."

He ripped open Ed's coat, dug into the breast pocket. His hand came out with a square envelope. It was addressed to Edward Race. Barney examined the angular handwriting, made sure that the letter was still inside the envelope, and then started to put it in his own pocket.

"I want a receipt for that letter!" Ed Race rapped.

Barney's eyes narrowed, "I'll give you a receipt, all right!" He raised his hand, fist clenched, for a back-handed swing at Ed's face, but he never completed the blow—Franz whispered, "Cheese, Lieutenant! The inspector's here!"

Barney's eyes smoldered. He turned slowly toward the newcomer in the doorway. This man was dressed in plain clothes; he had a quiet air of authority. His clear blue eyes narrowed in disapproval. "How many times have I told you," he demanded of the sullen lieutenant, "that I want no third-degree stuff in my squad. Maybe you have a lot of drag higher up, Barney, but, by God, while I'm inspector, you'll take orders from me! Is that clear?"

"I'm sorry, Inspector Mason," Barney murmured with an undertone of resentment in his voice. "I lost my temper. This prisoner was caught practically in the act of murder—there's Judge Hepley's body, still warm—and the woman identified him, then changed her mind!"

Inspector Mason strode into the room. "What's your name?" he asked Ed.

"Edward Race. I'm known as an actor."

Mason started. His mouth twitched, but he showed no other sign of excitement. "Clear the room!" he ordered curtly.

Franz and the other cop grudgingly released their grip on Ed, went out. Barney planted himself in front of his superior. "But listen, Inspector! This guy is a murderer! You ain't goin' to leave yourself alone in a room with him!"

"I said, clear the room!"

Barney shrugged and went out. The corpse of the murdered man seemed to watch his exit out of sardonically staring eyes. Mason put his hand on Mrs. Davis's shoulder. "You stay!" he said.

When the door closed behind Barney, Mrs. Davis burst out excitedly. "That's Mr. Race, Inspector, the man the Judge said was our only hope for saving my boy Frankie from hanging."

Mason nodded somberly. He extended his hand to Ed. "I know all about you. The Judge confided in me that you were going to play this town and he was going to ask you to help. I know, of course, that you did not kill the Judge. It's some ghastly frame-up of Commissioner Snead's. Barney is in on it, as usual, of course. He does Snead's dirty work. He takes his orders direct from the Commissioner and disregards me entirely. It looks as if you are in bad spot."

ED took out a pack of cigarettes and offered it to Mason. When the Inspector refused, he lit one himself, drawled through a cloud of smoke, "Where does this Commissioner Snead fit into the picture?"

"He fits, all right," Mason said. "And it's a nasty picture. Valentine Snead and his elephant of a son, Marvin Snead. Valentine used to be a ward-heeler, a petty politician, a go-between for the gangsters and the political clique that ran the town. Last year he got himself appointed Chief of Police. Anybody he doesn't like gets the works—like Judge Hepley, here. The judge has been fighting him and the administration for a long time. There are just a few of us on the force who have been rooting for the judge. Recently, it was hinted to me that I ought to retire, but, by God, I'm hanging on."

"Nice set-up," Ed grunted. He picked up his gun from the table where Franz had put it, sheathed it in the holster under his left arm-pit.

Mason watched him dejectedly. "How the devil did you get into this mess?" he asked.

"I suppose you know," Ed told him, "that the Judge wrote asking me to pay him a visit the minute I got into town. He wanted to interest me in the case of Mrs. Davis's son. He said Frankie had been convicted of the murder of Jack Wilson, a gambler, and that he was coming up for sentence tomorrow. But he was morally certain the boy was not guilty. He also said he had dug up certain information that would help me to unearth the real murderer."

Mason nodded gloomily. "So they got him before he could tell you anything. But how come this frame-up?"

Ed told him everything that had happened. A harried expression grew on Mason's face during the accounting. He shook his head hopelessly. "It's just like



the Wilson murder. Frankie Davis is the goat there; they'll try to make you the goat here." He suddenly looked old. "I don't know what to do."

Ed Race grinned confidently. "Let me handle this, Inspector. These birds are right up my alley. Just give me the lay of the land! You say Snead and his son are running this business. Now, where would I find Snead?"

"He would be at Headquarters," Mason told him wearily. "Go up Emmons to State Street, then left till you hit the City Hall. Police Headquarters is across the street. You can't miss it. Of course, I'll release you now for lack of evidence—but what can you do alone? The minute I try to work with you, Snead will relieve me of duty—"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence. The door was shoved open and Lieutenant Barney strode in, grinning broadly. He had heard Mason's last words. "You're a prophet, Inspector," he said, pointing to the telephone on the table before the Judge's body. "There's a call coming in right now."

As confirmation of his statement, the phone burst into a jangle, weirdly disrespectful of Judge Hepley's stiffening body.

Mrs. Davis answered. "It's for you, Inspector."

Mason picked it up, said, "Hello! Yes, Commissioner." He listened a while, replaced the receiver, a beaten look on his face. "That was Commissioner Valentine Snead," he announced. "I have been ordered to deliver a lecture at the Police School this morning. I'm to turn the investigation of this case over to Lieutenant Barney."

Barney said, "Sorry, Inspector," as if he didn't mean it.

Mason said nothing more. He went out with his shoulders sagging.

Barney called after him. "Tell the fingerprint men and photographers to come in, will you, Inspector?"

He turned to Ed Race, with a nasty smile, but the smile faded and his mouth opened in astonishment, for Ed had his automatic out and was pointing it negligently at Barney. Mrs. Davis stared wide-eyed, speechless.

ED stepped over to Barney, took the gun out of the lieutenant's holster, and flipped it into a corner. Then he pocketed his own gun. He touched his split lip and grinned wickedly at the officer. "All right, you big stiff," he breathed, "I owe you this one!" His right fist flashed up in a swift, short arc. There was a terrific thud, followed by a crack. Barney's jaw jerked to an unnatural angle. He was lifted from his feet and catapulted against the wall. Ed massaged the knuckles of his hand. He winked at Mrs. Davis.

"Good bye, lady," he said. "Don't worry about Frankie." He patted her shoulder. "When the boys outside come in, give them my love." He swung his legs over the window-sill and dropped to the driveway. He headed back past the garage, through the driveway in the rear, and came out on Union Street again. He walked rapidly away, dabbing a handkerchief at his cut lip.

Two blocks away, he flagged a cab, said, "Coulter Hotel."

The Coulter was only a block from City Hall. At the desk he said to the clerk, "You got a bag for me? My name's Race."

"Yes, Mr. Race," the clerk answered. He handed the little bag over the counter. "Your baggage arrived this morning, sir. You have room fourteen, on the second floor. Here's the key." He eyed Ed queerly.

Ed took the key, started to go, then turned back. "Anything wrong?" he demanded.

The clerk coughed behind his hand, looked uncomfortable. "Well, I guess you ought to know this. There was a detective here from headquarters right after your baggage came this morning. He was up in your room for a little while, and then left."

Ed said, "Yeah. That's something I really ought to know." He took some bills out of his pocket.

The clerk saw the bills, looked around furtively, then leaned over the counter and whispered, "Here's something else—there's somebody up in your room right now. Commissioner Snead himself! I saw him come in a while ago, and go in the manager's office. The manager rang for me and told me to bring a pass key. When I entered with it, I heard the manager say to Snead, 'It's room fourteen. I don't like it, but if you say it's okay—' Then they stopped talking when they saw me."

"How long ago was this?" Ed asked.

"Less than five minutes ago. I guess he's still up there."

Ed crumpled a twenty-dollar bill in the palm of his hand, passed it over the counter. "Thanks," he said.

The clerk's eye caught the figure 20 on the bill. "Thank you, sir!" he breathed fervently.

Ed left the bag at the desk and sprinted across the lobby. He disregarded the elevator, took the staircase. On the second floor he walked carefully down the corridor, and tried the door of his room. It was locked. Somebody within growled, "Who's that?"

"Telegram for Mr. Race," Ed piped, making his voice shrill.

Silence for a moment, then, "Slip it under the door."

"It's collect," Ed squeaked.

"All right," the voice grumbled. "Wait a minute."

THERE was a shuffling, and the door opened a crack. Ed had his gun out, and poked it into a soft stomach. He shoved the door open and walked in, slamming it behind him.

The man in the room was immense. Tissues of fat framed the little black eyes that squinted at Ed. He backed away from Ed's gun. "Who are you?" he stuttered.

"My name is Race," Ed grinned. "This happens to be my room. Sorry if I disturbed you."

"Your room? There must be a mistake. I—I thought it was my—"

"Is that why you opened my trunk? I see you picked the lock."

"Perhaps I can explain—"

"Go ahead." Ed's grim, knife-edged voice prodded.

"I'm well-known in the city. I'm sure I can satisfy you. If you'll call the desk and have them send up a policeman—"

"So you can squirm out of a jam, huh? Nix, Snead. I'm not falling for any of that."

Snead paled. "You—you know me?"

"Sure. And I know you're up here to work some kind of a frame on me. What I can't figure out is why you should come yourself." He bent to the trunk. "Let's see what you've been up to."

In the top drawer of the open trunk was the box that contained the six heavy revolvers that were part of his juggling act. Five of the revolvers were in their place, wrapped in chamois. The sixth was on the floor beside the trunk.

Ed picked up the forty-five and examined it. His eyes narrowed. He sniffed at it, then broke it and examined the chamber. "One shot fired," he said. "And recently. There's still the odor of powder." He pocketed his other gun. Now, almost unconsciously, from force of habit, he began to toss the heavy revolver in the air, catching it by the butt. He was thinking hard. "I wouldn't be surprised," he said, "if this is the gun that killed Judge Hepley. I can see the idea now. One of your detectives was up here this morning and got this out of the trunk. The killer used it on Judge Hepley, then brought it back to you. He was hurt, where I shot him, so you had to come yourself to plant it in my trunk again. And here it would be when my room was searched; it would coincide with the bullet from the judge's body, and I would be in a perfect spot for the fall guy. That's why Barney tried to get me out of the way this morning—so I wouldn't even have an alibi!"

As he spoke, he kept tossing the revolver in the air. Almost mechanically, he reached out his hand to catch it; and at that moment Snead launched his two hundred and thirty pounds at him, with a low cry of rage. The force of his attack threw the fat man heavily onto the open trunk. Snead's hand darted to a pocket and came out with a gun. Snead leveled the weapon. Ed gave him no time, dived at his feet. His shoulder caught the fat politician in the stomach, and sent him hurtling back into the trunk. Ed was right after him, and wrested the gun from his hand.

The fight was knocked out of Snead. He lay there, panting for breath. Ed yanked a sheet off the bed, twisted it into a rope, and wound it three times around Snead's waist, imprisoning his arms. Then he tied a knot.

"Now," he said, "we can talk about this like gentlemen!"

"Look here, Race," Snead gasped. "You're a sensible man. What's it worth to you to get out of town and forget about this whole business? How would ten grand appeal to you?"

Ed shook his head. "The only thing that will appeal to me is to get the murderer of the judge, and to find out who killed Wilson, the gambler, so I can spring Frankie Davis. I'm sure now, that the kid was framed the same as you were going to do to me. Come across with the guy's name, and we'll call it quits."

Snead said sulkily, "All right. Lieutenant Barney did it."

Ed grinned down at him, wagged his head. "Not so good, Commish'. Barney might have killed Wilson, but he couldn't have got to the judge's house before me. Somebody else did that. And I'll know him when I see him, because he's got a bullet hole in his shoulder."

"You fool!" Snead snarled. "Don't you know when you're well off? I'm offering you ten grand to drop the whole thing! What's it to you who killed who? You're only a stranger in this town!"

THERE was a peculiar light in Ed's eyes. "Judge Hepley was my friend," he said. "He once did me a great favor."

Snead barked, "What of it? You'll be doing yourself a greater favor by getting out of town. You can't beat this game. You can't hold me here forever. And even without the gun, we'll convict you of Hepley's murder. The D.A. will make out a tight case, all right. They're sweating that kid, Frankie Davis, down at headquarters now. They'll make him write out a statement that he knew the judge was afraid of you, that you had called up the judge on the long distance and threatened him. Anything'll go in this town—I own it!"

"I don't get this, at all," said Ed. "You were ready enough to cross Lieutenant Barney, and name him as Wilson's murderer—why don't you tell me the name of Judge Hepley's killer?"

Snead veiled his eyes. "I'll make that twenty thousand, Race, if you'll listen to reason."

Ed turned away. "No soap. I see where I better be doin' things. Thanks about that tip that they're working on Frankie. I'll have to look into that." He opened the door. "Well, so long. I'll be seeing you."

Snead's voice, raised in filthy threats, came through the door after he had closed it behind him. He grunted impatiently, re-entered the room, and stuffed a balled handkerchief into the fat man's mouth. Then he rolled up a thin face-towel and tied the handkerchief in place.

"You shouldn't talk so much," he reproved gently. Snead glared up at him helplessly as he left.

Downstairs, Ed winked to the desk clerk, crossed the lobby to the switchboard, and handed the girl a bill. "Listen, sweetheart," he said, "get me Inspector Mason at the Police School. If he's in the middle of a lecture, make them call him to the 'phone—I don't care how you do it."

The girl took a look at the bill, and smiled. "Depend on me, Mr. Santa Claus!"

It took about three minutes for Mason to get on the wire. Ed spoke low and earnestly, keeping an eye on the lobby meanwhile. "Look, Inspector," he demanded, "who would be in charge of the police department in case Commissioner Snead had—er—say, an accident?"

"Why," Mason told him, "Deputy Commissioner Porter would, ordinarily. But he's in the hospital for an operation, so I guess I'd be next in line, being chief inspector."

"All right," Ed said swiftly. "Snead has had that accident—or whatever you want to call it. Anyway, he's out of the picture. So you're *it!* Now, listen carefully! Get yourself about a dozen men you can trust—you told me there were some in the department. Have them meet you at headquarters *right away!* I'll be there, and things'll be happening. Just pile in with the boys when you see the fireworks!"

Ed hung up on Mason's excited questions, and hustled out of the hotel. He quickly covered the short distance to headquarters, where he pulled his hat down low, and went in. They would hardly be looking for him here so soon after his escape at Emmons Street, but he was wary. No one molested him as he traversed the cool ground-floor. He passed several uniformed men, and a couple of detectives, but they paid no attention to him. He walked by a door marked SQUAD ROOM, and another marked FINGERPRINT ROOM. He was unfamiliar with the

layout of the building, and moreover, Snead had neglected to tell him just where they had Frankie Davis.

He approached the information desk, and asked the uniformed man, "Say, where have they got this Frankie Davis kid? Inspector Mason sent me up."

The uniformed man didn't even look up from his work. He said negligently, "Upstairs in the commissioner's office. Lowry and Nevins took him up there a while ago."

Ed said, "Thanks," and went upstairs. At the end of the upper corridor he found a door marked COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE. He pushed in, found himself in a small anteroom. The sole occupant, a uniformed cop, was dozing. He opened his eyes with a start, frowned.

Opposite the entrance was another door, marked PRIVATE. From behind it came a buzz of excited voices.

"Whaddyuh want?" the cop demanded.

Ed said, "It's okay, bo." He opened the door and went through.

The cop shouted, "Hey! You can't go in there!"

Ed slammed the door in his face, leaned against it.

THE commissioner's office was large, richly furnished. At the window sat a bulky man with narrow, close-set eyes. His right arm was in a sling. He turned a startled face to the door.

But Ed paid him no attention for the moment. In the center of the room a slender lad sat beside a glass-topped mahogany desk. He was disheveled, haggard-looking. Two men in plain clothes stood over him. One was big, beefy, heavy-jowled. The other was thick-set and stocky, with a square chin and a crooked nose.

Ed's gun snapped out, covering the room. The man at the window with the arm in a sling, started to get up. He thought better of it at sight of the gun, sat down again. His face was white suddenly.

The beefy detective at the mahogany desk had the young lad's hair in a cruel grip. The boy's cheek was streaked with red splotches where he had been struck repeatedly. He was moaning, saying at the same time, "Please, Mr. Lowry, I can't stand it any more. I don't know Mr. Race. I never heard Mr. Race talk to the judge!"

Nevins, the other detective, whirled at the sound of the slamming door. Lowry let his fingers slip from the boy's hair, and turned slowly. The boy slumped back in the chair, holding his hand to his cheek.

Ed Race faced the four of them with a straight-lipped smile. His eyes were cold. "Now we'll have introductions. I'm the guy you were just asking this poor kid about. The name is Race. Maybe you'd like to ask me some of those questions?"

Nevins shuffled awkwardly. "Aw, we wouldn't of hurt the kid. We were offering to get him a break on his sentence, maybe life instead of hangin', if he'd open up on the Hepley murder. Now, don't get all het up—" His eye was on Ed's gun, "We were only doing our duty."

"Yeah," said Ed. "Your duty. Now maybe you'll tell me what's what about that bird by the window with his arm in a sling?"

Lowry glowered at him. "What's it to you? You're crazy, comin' in here when the whole force is on the hunt for you! Do you expect to get out of here again, maybe?"

Ed spoke coldly, thinly. "I asked you a question. Who is that guy with the busted wing?"

Frankie Davis suddenly sat up straight. "That's Marvin Snead," he piped. "The commissioner's son!"

Ed's eyes lighted in understanding. They flicked over to the man by the window. Now he saw the resemblance—paunchy stomach, thin, cruel mouth, narrow slits of eyes imbedded in a fatty, puffed-up face. But there was a certain weakness evident in Marvin's face that was not present in his father's.

Ed exclaimed, "Now I see why the commissioner wouldn't talk! His own son!"

He strode across the room, towered over Marvin Snead, put a heavy hand on his shoulder. "You're the guy I shot this morning! You're the guy that killed Judge Hepley! You killed Wilson, the gambler, too!"

Snead's face became a pasty white. "I never killed Wilson!" he shrieked.

Ed grinned down at him, lied, "Lieutenant Barney says different. Out on Emmons Street we had a little talk, and he mentioned your name."

"He's a damn liar!"

Nevins said hastily, "Don't fall for that, Marvin. Barney never talked!"

But Snead was in a sweat of panic. He rushed ahead, heedless of Nevins. "Barney killed Wilson himself! With his own gun! He still has it. He couldn't get rid of it on account the number is registered and he'd have to account for it!"

"Now we're getting some place," said Ed.

There was an oath from Lowry. "The damn cub! He's spilling his head!" He leaped at Ed, reaching for a gun.

Ed swung his revolver around, and the barrel caught Nevins squarely on the chin. He let out a gasp, and collapsed.

Lowry swung behind Frankie Davis' chair, pulled a gun, too. With his left hand he reached around and seized the lad by the throat, keeping him in the chair as a shield. Then he fired.

ED had been standing in front of Snead. He sidestepped just before the explosion of Lowry's gun, dropped to the floor. The slug zinged past him, and buried itself in Snead's body. Snead screamed, let out a choked cough, moaned, and was silent.

Lowry fired twice more, quickly, but Ed had rolled away. Frankie Davis lowered his head and bit into Lowry's wrist. At the same time Ed snapped a shot under the chair at Lowry's legs. Lowry cried out in pain, but Ed couldn't tell if it was his slug or Frankie's teeth.

Suddenly from outside there came a sound of shouts, and rushing feet. The door slammed open. Inspector Mason flung into the room, followed by a dozen men.

Lowry sprang from behind the chair, wild-eyed, and dashed for the window. Mason raised a gun, but didn't dare fire, for Ed had sprung at Lowry, caught his gun-arm, and twisted him into a helpless position with a punishing grip about his middle.

One of the men with Mason stepped up and snapped handcuffs on Lowry.

Mason exclaimed, "Good grief! Who got young Snead?"

"Lowry," Ed told him. "It was meant for me, but you can call it murder just the same. Maybe Lowry'll open up now to save his own neck. The two Sneads, Barney, Nevins, and Lowry himself were all in on the deal. Barney killed Wilson. I had it from Snead's own lips. Young Snead killed Judge Hepley. If necessary, we could prove the whole thing without Lowry, but if he'll talk, it might make it a little smoother."

Mason said, "What about it, Lowry?"

Lowry nodded gloomily. "I'll talk."

Mason seemed ten years younger. He said to Ed Race, "Newbold City is certainly in your debt for this clean-up!"

Frankie Davis came over and timidly plucked Ed's sleeve. "Can I go home now, please, Mr. Race?"

Ed grinned. "Don't ask me, kid, I'm only an actor." He pointed to Mason. "Ask the new commissioner. And if they don't make him commissioner, I'll come back and clean up this town for real, what I mean!"

