

Death on Morris Street

Doc Turner, #2

by Arthur Leo Zagat, 1895-1949

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The girl in his telephone booth made three Morris Street girls who had sought self-destruction in as many weeks. Doc Turner, very much disturbed, decided to investigate and, if possible, prevent more such untimely deaths!

ABIE, the errand boy in Andrew Turner's drug store on Morris Street, flipped a not too clean rag over the front of the telephone booth. Then he pulled its door open—and screamed!

There was the crash of a hastily dropped pestle from the back room and Doc Turner rushed out. "What is it, Abie?" he cried. "What's happened?" He lunged across the store to where the youngster was staring, voiceless, his hand clenched on the door edge and the grimed swarthiness of his face turned to a greenish gray.

Doc had to jerk hard on the contorted shape to extricate it from the cramped compartment. It came loose with a rip of tearing fabric and slid, sickeningly limp, out onto the floor. The body straightened, was revealed as a young woman, her face white as the tiles under her, a reddish-brown liquid dribbling from one corner of her carmine mouth.

"At," Abie exclaimed. "Ai, eet's Lena Hammerschlag!"

Doc sniffed at the tell-tale stain. "Iodine!" he snapped. "Get the box of corn starch, Abie, and water in a big graduate. Hustle!"

The boy scurried to the rear and the pharmacist reached for the girl's pulse. Her pointed, red-daubed nails were dug into a slip of paper. Turner pulled it away, glanced at it, and stuffed it into a pocket of his splotched alpaca coat. He fumbled for and found the almost nonexistent beat in the flaccid wrist.

Faces were pressed against the window in the store door, noses flattened against the plate glass made moist-looking, greenish spots from which wisps of gray haze spread downward. The girl twitched, whimpered. Doc shifted his position so that her face was hidden from the peering, morbidly-curious eyes. "Lord," he muttered.

Abie ran out, a yellow, oblong box in one hand, in the other a broken-lipped quart graduate half full. "Here, Meester Toiner. Here dey are."

The pharmacist snatched them from him, set the graduate on the floor, sprinkled the white powder into it. "Shoot the bolt on the door," he directed, "and then call the police for an ambulance." He pulled a spatula from his vest pocket, stirred the starchy mixture.

Abie's dark eyes were glittering with excitement. He grabbed a blue carton from a shelf on his way to the door and called, "Shall I put eet de Nastin's Coughlex een de vinder?"

"Yes," Doc blurted, preoccupied with his task of forcing Lena's mouth open and tipping the antidote into it in a slow stream. "Of course." Where the mixture splashed on the dribble of iodine it turned a purplish blue. "Hey, what did you say that for?"

"De seegnal I shouldn't know eet, dot you vant Jeck Ransom! Hah! Mine beeg ears dey ain't stuffed ahp yet."

"What makes you think I want Jack?"

"Ain't eet you und heem been talking from how so many goils don't come home no more from aroundt Morris Street? Ain't eet Lena Hammerschlag she ees vun from dem? Hah? Abie de boy detecatiff you ken't fool."

"You brat! Get in there and call the ambulance. We'll need a stomach pump. She hasn't swallowed much of the starch and her heart's too weak for me to chance an emetic."

"Hah?"

"Never mind. Get that call in or I'll break your neck."

The booth door closed on the *ping* of Abie's coin and the quick rattle of his dialing. Turner watched his patient's face anxiously, saw the whiteness of her skin grow slowly waxen, felt the throb of heart blood under his fingertips fade. Even in its collapse there was a pathetic jauntiness about the girl's figure. The sleazy silk of her gaily colored frock was drawn tightly over curves just rounding into

maturity. Her bobbed blond hair showed the reddish glint of henna to his practiced eye, her eyebrows had been tweezed to penciled, unnatural lines.

Her throat—Doc's face hardened and he pulled at his nicotine-stained white mustache—her throat had been washed thick with liquid powder, but under the chalky coating were dimly visible three blue blotches, bruises made by brutal fingers. There was another on her arm. The dying girl's countenance was lined with despair, twisted with an anguish that was not physical.

The old druggist recalled Lena Hammerschlag scuttering in and out of this store ten years ago, a pig-tailed tomboy of eight with blue eyes that flashed joyousness and a smile that tore at one's heart. His own faded gray eyes went bleak, and the nostrils of his big nose flared in a way his few intimates would have known, meant cold threat to someone.

Lena was one of Andrew Turner's children, one of the brood grown up under his kindly eye and his sage counsel to bewildered parents whom the years had not acclimatized to the strange ways of a strange land. She was one of his children, and there were those who had already learned that it was not wise to prey upon these wards of the mild-mannered, white-haired old druggist who had doddered, so innocuous-seeming, about his dusty pharmacy for more years than he cared to think.

The doorknob rattle swung Doc around. "There's Jack, Abie," he said. "Let him in."

Jack Ransom, red headed and long-armed, moved with a lithe grace that denied the clumsy appearance of his squat, thick body. Breath hissed from him as he reached the little group before the booth, and the grease smudge on his cheek was suddenly blacker for the flight of color beneath it. "God, Doc!" he burst out "Another!"

Turner's voice was flat, inflectionless, as he looked up at the young garage man. "Yes," he said. "The second in a week. But this one came home to die."

"Is she..."

"Gone. Yes. The iodine she took could not have acted so fast. Look here."

"God! This—this is terrible!" Jack's mouth twisted. "What will old Oscar do?"

Turner lifted heavily to his feet. "Perhaps he will be relieved. There are worse things than death... for a girl."

The frightening clang of an ambulance bell silenced him. Abie let in a snip-faced, swaggering interne in immaculate white, uniform cap askew on pompadoured hair; and a burly, grave-faced policeman. The surgeon's black bag thudded on a counter. "What is it this time?" he drawled.

"Poison," Turner said slowly, his face hardening. "Iodine. But you can't do anything for her. She's dead."

"Oh yeah?" There was contempt in the ambulance-man's phrase, haughty superiority. What did this old fool know about life and death?

"Let's take a look." He knelt to what had been Lena Hammerschlag, whistling softly between his teeth. For a flickering instant the self-conscious smirk vanished from his face. Then he was hard-boiled again. "Another tart passed out," he grunted.

A long glance passed between the old druggist and Tim Healy, the grizzled cop whose flat feet had pounded Morris Street's rubbish-strewn pavement for not

much shorter a time than Doc had held sway on its principal corner. They knew what the years held in store for the youth and could be tolerant of his callow airs.

The morgue-wagon pulled away with its grisly load. Tim shooed away the last of the thrill-seeking spectators, and came in for a final word. His eyes were narrowed. "Riley on the dead-wagon tells me there was another kid fished out of the river tonight," he said. "'Bout seventeen, black hair, black eyes. Two gold teeth. Sounds like the Ascanio girl to me."

Turner prodded a nail-head in the counter with one acid-stained thumb. "That's three accounted for," he said grimly. "Where are the other five, Tim?"

Healy shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. They've all gone out fer a walk in the evenin', or to the movies or work, an' dropped out of sight. Nothin' been heard o' them since, 'cept fer Becky Rabinowitz that was found hangin' from a tree in Central Park, an' these other two. Th' dicks ain't turned up a thing."

"And they won't" Ransom's tone was bitter. "If it was some Garden Avenue debs that didn't come home for a day or so the whole damn department would be turned inside out."

"Becky Rabinowitz an' Lena Hammerschlag don't rate front page headlines in the paper, nor promotions." Tim's eyes were agate. "There's plenty more where they came from. Well, I've got to call in a report on this. Then I'll have to go to her father's butcher shop up Morris Street and break the news. Nice job, that!"

The door closed behind the policeman. "It's up to us again, Jack," Turner said slowly, and fumbled in his pocket. "Look at this." He brought out the bit of paper he had taken from Lena's hand. "Mean anything to you?"

The scrap showed little marks where the dead girl's nails had bitten into it in her final paroxysm. It had been torn from a scratch pad, and there were numbers and letters scrawled on it in blurred pencil. The younger man read them aloud, musingly.

"*Eight seven nine E three R nine.* Sounds like an address, with the street left out. Eight seventy-nine East something, third floor rear. Maybe the last number, nine, means nine o'clock."

"The only trouble with that is, that the numbers on no street in the city run up that far." The druggist's fingers drummed on the wood of the sales counter. "It's a code of some sort."

"If it's a code I'm licked. I ain't no good at puzzles."

"Nor I. But we've got to solve it. Got to! She called someone on the telephone just before she drank the iodine. I remember hearing the sound of the nickel she dropped. Didn't see her come in, didn't pay any more attention after that."

"Meester Toiner!" Abie's mop, that had been very deliberately clearing away the slopped remnants of the futile antidote, halted in mid-career. "Meester Toiner, vy should eet Lena haff de paper in her hand the vile she vos talkink?"

"Oh hoh," Ransom chuckled. "Abie the boy detective is with us once more."

"Und so?" The urchin's shoulders and hands cooperated in an expressive racial gesture. "So vat? I deedn't do eet so bad de lest time. Answer me, Meester Smart Aleck. Vy should she?"

"Maybe," Ransom suggested, "she was repeating the code message to someone else."

"That doesn't sound reasonable, Jack." Doc said. "She'd hardly be doing anything like that with her mind made up to suicide. She wouldn't be helping the gang along... You have an idea, Abie. What is it?"

"Veil, I'm teenkink like dees. Vot kind papers does pipple usually haff in deir hand ven dey telephone?"

"Most frequently a notation of the number they are calling..."

"Ahah!" The errand boy raised a finger whose nail was in deep mourning.

"...But this is no telephone number," Turner went on. "Look at it. *Eight seven nine E three R nine.*"

"Maybe—come here, Meester Toiner. Please. I vant to show eet you somet'ings by de dial."

The two men crowded around the door of the booth into which Abie had slipped. "Look eet," he said. "Een each from dese lettle holes ees t'ree letters und ah noomber."

"Of course. Anyone knows that."

The boy continued. "Vere ees eight ees also t, u, und v. Vere ees seven ees also p, r und s. De next noomber on de paper ees nine. Ain't eet dot makes—look on de leest from centrals here on de wall—dot makes t, r, 9. Trefelger nine!"

"Jerusalem! I think the kid's got something." Ransom was quick to make amends. "But does the rest of it fit?"

"E 3 R 9. Just four numbers, 3379! Sure enough. Trafalgar 9, 3379. It is a telephone number. Good boy, Abie!"

"And it's right in this section too. This is the Trafalgar district. Now we're getting some place." Jack's eyes glowed. "If we can get the address..."

"But how are we going to do that without going to the police? The telephone company is cagy about—"

"Leave it to me—I'll handle that."

He stepped inside the booth, came out but moments later.

"Cost me a box of candy, but I've got it." The carrot-topped chap was grim-faced. "Trafalgar 9-3379 is the Whileaway Dance Hall around here on Fanston Alley. It's a dime-a-dance joint, but I didn't think there was anything out of the way going on there."

The old pharmacist rubbed haze from a showcase front with his handkerchief. "The Hammerschlag girl's last words were to someone there," he said. "I want to know who it was, and what she said."

"There's a tough bunch hangs out there."

Turner's silvery hair seemed to bristle. "I'll fix up something that will tame them," was his answer. "You shoot home and get cleaned up. By the time you're back I'll be ready to close."

"That'll be eleven. Just about the time things begin to warm up at the Whileaway."

"Good Lord! Its ten now. Abie—go home, and come on time tomorrow for a change."

TWISTED glass tubing crawled in a red blaze across the front of a three-story frame house, relic of the days when Fanston Alley was a flower-bordered

country road sloping pleasantly down to the river. Its contortions made lurid letters that spelled out:

Whileaway Dance Hall
50 Beauties 50

Jack's dented flivver chugged up and groaned to a halt before the dance hall. The door opened—let Turner and Ransom into jazz-blare and steamy atmosphere of mingled powder-smell and sweat. An unconscious dignity in Doc Turner's bearing made him strangely out of place here. The peroxide-topped, mascara-eyed girl in the ticket cage seemed to sense it, as did the dark chap with the wasp-waist and pointed, waxed mustache who advanced to meet the newcomers.

"Good evening, Doctor Turner," he said. His voice was oily, but his lips scarcely moved. "I am honored, and a bit—er—surprised. I did not think you went in for this sort of thing." A little flicker of worry showed in the black glitter of his tiny eyes. There was a faint hint of accent in his enunciation, a precision of utterance that betrayed alien birth.

Doc smiled blandly. "My young friend here persuaded me that I needed a little gayety. But—you know me?"

The other bowed. "As who does not. I regret that I am not as well known to you. Permit me to present myself, René Dandreaux."

"This is Jack Ransom," said Doc. "I spent many hours in this house, a long time ago, Mr. Dandreaux, when Major Applegate owned it. It was—a little different in appearance then." Turner glanced at the garish draping of the hall, at the broad staircase, still graceful, curving to cacophony above.

Dandreaux gestured deprecatingly with a long, slim hand whose manicured nails sparkled in rose light-flood. "Please do not blame me for the decorations," he said. "I have only recently leased this place and it is just as the previous proprietor left it. My—er—clients prefer it so, and I dare not change." He sighed. "Houses and men, Doctor, sometimes fall on evil days. But you have not come here to talk with me," he broke off. "Mamie, give Doctor Turner and his friend a roll of tickets. They are my guests for the night."

Doc Turner frowned. "This is your business, your living," he said. "You would not expect me to give you medicine for nothing if you visited my store." The druggist got out a frayed wallet, extracted a bill. "I will pay for my entertainment." The two made their way up the broad stairs, and into the dance hall, where they seated themselves at one of the tables that bordered the polished floor.

"The Count of Kakyak downstairs wasn't as tickled to see us as he made out." Jack leaned across the little table as he spoke, but even a shout would have been amply covered by the din of the negroid band and the shuffling of feet on the crowded dance floor.

Turner twisted the glass in front of him with gnarled fingers and stared at its amber contents with distaste. "No," he said slowly. "No—he wasn't pleased. His fine manners covered something up—something that is going on in this house."

"Maybe on the upper floor—it isn't here." Ransom's gaze wandered over the jiggling, swaying dancers. The table where they were seated was one of a single row lining a wall hung with a fabric the stiff folds of which simulated silk. A

wooden railing ran close along the inner edges of the tables, barring access to the polished floor except at one point, where a gray-uniformed special policeman collected admission coupons. "Can't say it's a particularly appetizing bunch out there," Ransom went on, "but they aren't doing anything except dance. Damn few from the neighborhood, though. None of the girls. There's Tony Sremante and Izzy Ginsberg, the delicatessen man's son. And—I'll be a son of a sea-cook!" He gave vent to a low whistle.

"What is it?" Turner snapped.

"Careful how you look—but just see who's taking a whirl with the overstuffed grandma—down at the other end."

Doc let his head turn slowly till his apparently aimless scrutiny reached the two indicated. They were hopping about in ludicrous imitation of the younger couples, the simpering woman whose ample curves were inadequately covered by a vividly scarlet dress and the man whose round, close-clipped head was so typically Teutonic. Words dripped quietly through the pharmacist's mustache! "It's Oscar Hammerschlag. I don't understand."

"Dancing here with his daughter lying stiff on a Morgue slab! The old..."

THE music screamed to an end, and attendants moved about the floor, clearing it. Waiters scurried among the filling tables. "I want to talk to him, Jack," Doc said. "Ask him to have a drink with us."

Ransom's jaw set grimly. "I'd rather string him up. Of all the—"

"Don't jump at conclusions, my boy. There's something underneath this. Hop to it before another dance starts."

The butcher's little mouth was fixed in a smile as he joined them, but there was no smile in the china-blue eyes that were almost hidden by the round of his cheeks. "It pecooliar iss you to see here, nicht?" he said heavily.

"Not as much as to see you here tonight of all times," Doc answered. "Oscar, will you pardon an old friend if I ask why?"

"Fynot?" The ham-like hand Hammerschlag had laid on the table, quivered almost imperceptibly. "Here iss lights, laughter, gayery. For a lone man home to stay iss—not goot."

Jack grunted, then averted his eyes at Doc's warning glance. He glimpsed Dandreaux standing just within the entrance to the dance room, and it seemed to him the sleek one's gaze had just then shifted from their own table.

"I don't believe you, Oscar." There was challenge, but no offense, in the druggist's low tone. "You're after something."

"Nein! No! Only moosic, a tance, a trink. Only—forgetfulness."

"You're after something," Doc repeated implacably. "And I think we can help you... if you will let us. Come, old friend—remember that I helped to bury your wife Greta—and that I have given many a peppermint drop to—Lena."

"Lena!" The name was a sob retched from the very depths of the man's mountainous body. "Lena. Ach! You are right I do look for somedings. I look for Lena's—murterer!" Two white spots showed on either side of his button nose. "In mein pocket a refolfer iss—four bullets for him und the last—for me."

Doc sipped. "Lena killed herself," he said.

"Ach! So der mann who shtripped from her der vill too liff iss not a murterer!
You think not dot, mein freund?"

"Why do you look here for him?"

"Fy do I look here? Becauss I'm an old fool. Because fen mein daughter neeted me I turned mein headt de odder way. I saw her—*Gott möge sie bestrafen*—I saw her face at a window on der upstairs floor here diss morning and passt by because I hatt cast her my life out"

"What!"

"Yess. Dere vass another face by her, a man's. Van from dese lounge-lizards he looked, shiny hair und a misplaced eyebrow. He pullt her the vindow away from—"

"Good God! You—"

"Watch out," Jack murmured. "Here comes the count."

"—cannot be elected. The people of the district—"

Dandreux leaned over Doc. "I hope you are enjoying yourself, Doctor Turner," he said smoothly. "Is there anything I can get for you?"

"Nothing." The pharmacist saw the German's face go white and snatched at his wrist under cover of the tablecloth, his wrist that had started slow movement to a hip pocket. "Thank you. We are well taken care of. Everything is very nice." His voice was steady. There was unexpected strength in the fingers with which he clamped Oscar's straining arm. "Certainly it is more pleasant than my gloomy store."

White teeth flashed, but there was something vulpine in Dandreux's smile. "You must come here often. Should you like to meet some of the ladies?"

With his free hand Doc pointed to his hair. "I am rather past that. No. I prefer to sit here and watch."

The owner of Whileaway Hall twirled his mustache. "A man is as old as his—feelings. No?" He chuckled meaningly, but a peculiar tenseness edged his light voice, and his beady eyes with the dark pouches under them probed.

TURNER's reply was bland, but firm. "Thank you again. Perhaps later I shall feel up to—conversation, I have just finished a sixteen hour day and I am not as young as I used to be."

Exasperation shaded Dandreux's thin face for an instant, but he was suave. He shrugged his shoulders, glided off toward the entrance, moving noiselessly.

Hammerschlag's lips were white and his eyes burned. "Dot vass him! Dot vass der feller I seen der vindow at! Fy ditn't you let me shoot him?"

Lights went out, except for a simulated moon in the ceiling- center, the illumination from which did not reach the line of tables. The negroes started a dreamy waltz. Turner's words dripped into the dark: "Because, if I had, five other girls would have been lost to a fate worse than Lena's. Five girls who are somewhere in this house."

Oscar gasped, started to say something. But Jack's chair, the back of which was to the wall, scraped with sudden movement.

"Look out!" Ransom's warning was a low murmur. "There's someone behind the curtains—just back of me. I can hear him breathing."

The band was playing the *Blue Danube*, and the few waltzers were gliding silhouettes, close gripped in the nostalgic spell of the music. The old pharmacist

let go his hold on the German, leaned close to Jack, and whispered, "How long has he been there?"

"I don't know. God! If he's heard anything we'll never get out of here alive!"

"Wait! There was a back staircase here somewhere. If I can only remember. They've ripped out the room-partitions and it's hard to tell. But it must still be there."

The waltz broke into sudden desecrating syncopation and splintered light, red and green, whirled dizzily over the room. Doc twisted. "Oscar!" he blurted. "Good Lord! Where is he?"

"There! Just going outside. Holy Moses! The crazy Dutchman's going after Dandreaux!"

"I've got it, Jack, I've got it! Those stairs must be right here. We've got to get above and find the girls before Oscar—"

"Come on!" Ransom was on his feet, twisting, Doc too. The older man snatched aside the rayon wall-curtain. A light-flash showed a vague form, a pale startled face against which Jack's fist crashed before the eavesdropper could move. The man collapsed, and the fabric, dropping behind, shut them out of the dance room. The split-second action had been covered completely by drum-roll and whirling, blinding lights.

They were on the landing of a narrow staircase, dim-lit by one small bulb that came up from darkness and lifted into dark above. Ransom, on his knees, stuffed his victim's handkerchief into his thin-lipped mouth, used the fellow's own belt to lash his wrists, twisted behind, to drawn-up ankles. "He's got no gun," he grunted. "Where now?"

"Up!"

AS THEY stole up those shadowed steps muffled drumming beat through to them like the pulse of savage tom-toms in the jungle. Then Doc, a little ahead, felt a door-surface bar his way. His hand found the knob. The door creaked open, but there was only dimness beyond.

Gradually their eyes became used to the darkness, and they made out that they were in a long corridor, door-lined.

"They must be in these rooms." The druggist's voice was a breath in the stillness. "We'll try this one first. It's locked but the key's in the door." Red light from the sign outside splashed in. There was a bed, and a form on it, sheet-covered.

"Who's there!" It was a terrified whisper.

"Hush!" Turner slid in, Ransom after him, and the door shut behind them. "Friends!"

The girl jerked up to a sitting position. A bare arm held linen against her chest and bare shoulders gleamed luridly. "God! Doc Turner! How—how did you get here?"

"We came to get you out, Helda," the pharmacist whispered hurriedly. "Where are your clothes?"

"Clothes? I haven't any." She laughed hysterically. "Don't need any—here—till they take us to the boat."

"Boat! What boat?"

"The boat the greaser's takin' us away on—to his cabaret in South America. Cabaret!" Her mirthless, horrible laugh sounded again. "Ain't that hot?"

"The other girls—what's happened to them?" Doc's usually kindly face was deep-lined with threat, his mild eyes blazed.

"Nothin' yet. They're locked in the other rooms up here. That is, all but Becky Rabinowitz an' Lena Hammerschlag an' that wop kid. Them three raised a ruckus, so Dandreaux called in his gang an' afterward they was thrown out in the gutter. They'll stay there too, I guess... The way they was they wouldn't dare show their faces at home."

"Hell" Jack snorted. "Why didn't they go to the police?"

"The cops! Lena said she'd do that. They told her to try it, to call up here an' let us know what happened. She did 'phone, a couple hours ago. The dicks laughed at her—told her to go back on the street where she came from. I guess that's why Dandreaux let her talk to me, to show it wasn't no use."

Turner's expression was forbidding, his mouth a thin straight line. "Hers was an old story to them. They've heard it a hundred times, and ninety-nine it has been a tissue of lies concocted by some unfortunate girl to excuse something that was her own fault, or for revenge. The gang that is working here banked on that. But we'll spoil their plans. We'll—"

"*Stop talking big and reach for the ceiling!*" a silky voice said, twisting Doc and Jack to the unregarded door behind them. Dandreaux was there, a leveled automatic in his hand, his sharp face livid. "Who's going to spoil my plans?"

With his arms lifting above his head, Doc spoke as if to a customer across his counter: "I am, Mr. Dandreaux."

"Ah! The great Turner will work magic! Of the same sort, perhaps, as he did just now in his great disappearing act, forgetting, most unfortunately, that I might return and notice his absence, guess very quickly where he must have gone."

"You can't get away with it, Dandreaux. This is America, not Marseilles."

"No? A few dollars in the right places and presto, it is accomplished!"

"Your filthy coin cannot buy us." There was no excitement in Doc's tone. "And you don't dare to keep us prisoners or kill us. Your money cannot smooth over murder, Dandreaux."

"It will not have to. Another hour and I kiss this America of yours good-bye. I and the stock I have gathered for my—cabaret... But... you, girl—tear up that sheet and tie them."

"But I'm naked. I—"

"I've seen more enticing figures than yours. Hurry—I have much to do and little time in which to do it."

Jack's feet shifted under him, gathering for a spring of desperation. Dandreaux caught the movement. "Stop!" he snapped. "A night tied up is better than death. And by God, I'll shoot if you try anything, shoot you down and take my chances."

"Stop, Jack. He's right" The old man seemed to have given up.

"You have reason, *mon ami*. He is too young to die. Hurry, girl—my finger trembles on the trigger."

UNDER the spur of the man's snake-like, glittering eyes and his viperish gun, Helda did a good job of tying.

"Gag them," Dandreaux snapped. "Throw the old one on the bed and the other across the room under the window. So! Good girl."

He bent over them in turn, testing knots, poking inquisitive hands into pockets. "No weapons," he said aloud. "Not even knives. Just some bottles the old man has. He comes prepared for his drug business, not for coping with Dandreaux... Come now, girl. The others are dressing, and we leave at once for the steamer. The hall is emptying now, soon the house will be vacant save for these nosy ones."

The door closed behind the two. Beyond it there was the sound of gruff voices, a shrill feminine protest, the sharp spat of a slap. Jack lay quiescent, hopeless, but Doc was twisting, jerking himself about on the bed.

Footsteps thudded along the hall, and the odor of kerosene seeped into the room. Someone called, "Give the candle fifteen minutes to burn down to the oil; that's all we need to get out. And the rest of you make it snappy. The old dump'll go up like tinder."

Jack's scalp tightened. Dandreaux's intention was plain now—he had no intention of leaving the two alive. But bullets tell tales. There was silence now, silence in which Ransom thought he could hear the candle sputtering, burning down to ignite the inflammable liquid that would make Whileaway Hall a torch, a pyre. Horror rippled chill waves up his spine, and he battled his bonds. But the knots held. His burning eyes sought Turner; he tried to gurgle a farewell through his gag.

But the old man was queerly contorted; his bound hands were in the side-pocket of his jacket. They came out, and there was a glass something in them, a frail-looking cylinder whose end was spun to a point. The druggist's fingers worked till that point snapped off. Syrupy liquid dripped from it, down the pharmacist's wrists, and crawled across the line strip that bound them. Where that liquid touched flesh it seared it white. When it had reached the cloth, that turned brown, then black. A pungent aroma filled the room. Doc moaned with pain, but he held still while the acid from the ampoule ate into his lashings and his flesh.

Under the none too tight-fitting door a dark liquid trickled, and the lamp-oil smell drowned out the odor of acid and corroding flesh. There still were sounds in the house, but they were more distant, muffled. How much longer did the candle have to burn?

Doc jerked his hands apart. His fingers worked feverishly, untying the knot at his ankles. He ripped the gag from his mouth even as he rolled off the bed. "Told you I'd fix things up for a tough gang, Jack," he said. "The ampoule fooled him." He was across the room, at the door. "He would have taken a knife."

Doc pulled the door open. In the corridor was a tiny flame atop a candle a scant inch long. The druggist leaped for the fuse, snuffed it out with his fingers. He was back in the room, was bending over Jack, was ripping open the knots binding the younger man in frantic haste.

"Come on, boy," he snapped. "I think they're still downstairs. Maybe we can save the girls yet!"

The corridor was deserted, the hidden stairs, the gaudy dance-room. All was drenched, dripping with kerosene. They hurtled to the head of the stairs, skidded to a stop. In the entrance lobby below were five girls, their faces blanched with fear and despair, dark pouches under their tear-reddened eyes. Dandreaux was there,

nattily-hatted, a cane on his arm, and three hard-faced, heavy-jowled men had blue revolvers in their hands.

"Stop!" Doc shouted. "Stop or you die!" In his hand there was another ampoule. Jack saw that it was larger than the first, divided through the center. On one side of the inner glass partition there was a white powder; the other compartment held a glinting liquid.

Dandreux jerked to Turner's snapped command. "Name of a cow," he ripped out. "The prying *pharmacien*! Shoot him, Jean. Shoot him down like the dog he is."

The tallest of the thugs jerked up his gun hand, his weapon snouted point-blank at Turner.

"Stop!" Doc's voice rang again.

Something in his ringing voice stayed the gorilla's finger on the trigger, something in the blazing menace of that slight figure. "Killing me won't save you." His hand with the ampoule in it was above his head, his thin arm tensed to throw the thing. "There's death in this glass, instant death for all of you!" If it had been a revolver he held, Dandreux's killer would have fired, but the mysterious threat of the odd-shaped container appalled him, gave Doc the instant's respite he needed.

"There's sodium cyanide in this," he said, "and sulphuric acid." The old man's voice was knife-edged. "When the two get together they'll explode into cyanogen gas, prussic acid gas, and one sniff of that will kill an elephant. I'll throw it, smash it at your feet, and they *will* get together. If you hit me it will smash among you. And you will all die, miserably!"

Bullets can miss, one has a chance to fight against bullets. But this deadly thing! Fear flared into Jean's eyes, into the squinted eyes of the other gangsters. "Don't," one squeezed out. "Don't throw that! We'll give in!"

"*Cochons!*" the panderer squealed. "Scared pigs! I'll kill him myself!" His cane clattered to the floor and his automatic was in his fist. Helda screamed, and Doc's arm jerked back for the throw. Jean lunged for Dandreux, struck down his wrist. A bullet blazed into the floor, lead death meant for Doc Turner. Jean clung to the white-slaver's wrist.

"Fool! Idiot!" The man's lips snarled back from pointed teeth, his face was bestial in its ferocity. "He doesn't dare throw! The girls would die too. He bluffs."

Andrew Turner's accents were grim as he answered: "Don't count on that, Dandreux. Death would be better for them than what you are taking them to. But I've had enough of this. Drop your guns, all of you. I shall give you till I count ten. One. Two. Thr—"

Four weapons had thudded on the carpet.

"That's better! Now, you girls, get out of here. Get out of here and go home."

There was a shrill chorus of feminine cries, and white faces flamed with incredible joy. "Get out of here!" Doc gritted. "Before something else happens."

Helda, clothed now, was the first to pull the door open and scutter out. The rest followed her, disappeared.

"We'll wait now—" Doc's voice dropped flatly—"till they are safely away."

Running footsteps sounded behind Jack on the dance floor—a heavy pair pounding across the floor, and a lighter set! Ransom whirled. The corpulent Hammerschlag loomed out of the dimness, shot past him. Behind, his swarthy face working, his pipe-stem legs vibrating in futile pursuit, was little Abie!

"Jeck! Jeck! Ah gun he's got eet Ah gun!"

Jack whirled again, just in time to see flame spurt from the German's revolver, just in time to see Dandreaux jerked back against the wall by the impact of the bereaved father's lead.

"Murterer!" Oscar shouted. "Murterer!" His gun crashed once more. There was a look of ludicrous surprise on the face of the trafficker in human flesh, and he slid gently to the floor.

"Lena! You are avenched. Greta! *Ich komm' zu dir!*" Before Ransom could snatch at it Hammerschlag's gun spoke again, but this time its blast was muffled by his own breast. He pitched down the stairs, his rotund form landed square atop the prostrate Dandreaux's, and their blood mingled on the carpet.

"Oi!" Abie exclaimed. "Oi! By de beck stairs I sneak een ven de boss dun't come outd. Und I hear on ah closet door ah pounceeng. Dot Oscar ees eensite ven I open ahp, und he says someteengs aboidt vaiting for as chanct to shoot someboty. Den ve hear voices, Meester Toiner's und someone else's, und he runs pest me like ah *meshuggener*. I teenk eet's de boss he vants to shoot eet. Oi!"

The front door opened, and a stalwart figure, blue-clad, was silhouetted in the aperture. "What's going on here?" came from the policeman. Then Tim Healy saw Andrew Turner. "Doc! What..." His florid face lit up with sudden enlightenment and his eyes flicked back to the disarmed thugs. "Oh, I get it. Say, by all that's holy, this is Chicago Frenchy you've got here. An' his two pals, too. They're wanted, and how! Well, I'll be eternally damned."

Abie watched Healy's expert manacling of his prisoners. Then he turned to Jack, a grimy finger stabbing in Doc Turner's general direction. "Oi, vat ah detecatiff mein boss ees, hah! Vat ah Shylock!"

