

Death to the Winner

by Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951

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Pat Donnelly looked at the cop and shrugged. The girl, standing there over the dead body of a notorious rounder, was beautiful, cultured, wealthy. Yet there was a gun in her hands—confession on her lips. It was none of Pat's business, and there was nothing he could do—but that was before he learned the identity of the dark-eyed, self-confessed killer...

Chapter I

IT was a quarter to four in the morning when "Lucky" Pat Donnelly walked out of Barney's Place with thirty-two thousand in cash that he had run up from five hundred dollars on an astounding series of six naturals in a row.

Barney paid off with a grimace. "I ought to bar you, Pat," he said sourly. "Every time I see you walk in here, I get a pain in the neck. I don't mind you winning; but all those palookas rode along with you. Those six naturals cost me a cool hundred grand in side bets!"

Pat Donnelly grinned, stuffed the wad of thousand dollar bills carelessly in his trousers pocket.

"You can afford it, Barney. Think of all the snake-eyes that have turned up on those tables of yours. It's about time you paid a dividend."

He nodded a casual good-by to the two strong-arm boys who were always present wherever Barney was, and stepped out of the lavishly furnished office. Barney walked with him down the corridor to the head of the stairs.

He put a hand on Pat Donnelly's arm, said:

"Look, Pat. If I was you, I'd be a little careful. Sassoon's back in New York!" Pat's eyes narrowed. "When did you hear that, Barney?"

"Today. Nobody knows where he's hanging out, but some of the boys have whispered to me that he's supposed to be the one that's backing Steve Kline in the Movieland Cabaret. You want to be on the watch, Pat. Sassoon ain't licked by a long shot, and he's a guy that never forgets."

Pat smiled. "Thanks for the tip. But how about you? Sassoon probably has you on his list too—"

Barney jerked his head backward toward the door of his private office, where his two bodyguards stood, watchful, their hands ever in their jacket pockets.

"I got Vic and Smoky on the job. You travel around by yourself. Like now—going out alone at four in the morning. A bullet in the back—"

Pat laughed, his long lean face softening for a moment as he glanced down at the earnest, stocky little gambling house proprietor.

"I'll manage, Barney. Don't lose any sleep over me."

He started down the stairs, but Barney gripped his sleeve again.

"It's not that so much, Pat. I've been thinking of something else. My girl, Wanda. Sassoon's a snake. He might be afraid to go after either of us. But it'd be just like

him to work some kind of hell on my daughter. And Wanda runs around the town like nobody's business. I tried to get her to let Vic or Smoky tail along with her, but she just laughed at me. I've been waiting for you to get back to town to meet that girl, Pat. She's been in a convent, but she's got fire, and courage. Like her mother used to be. She's just letting off steam now, running around town, but she'll settle down all right—if Sassoon don't get his claws into her—"

Pat Donnelly's voice interrupted him harshly. "What makes you thing Sassoon might make a play against your kid, Barney?"

"Because that's the way his mind works. He knows I got bodyguards. He knows you're hell with a gun, and got nine lives like a cat. So he'd just naturally figure out a stunt to get at me through her."

Pat Donnelly's lips were a thin, grim line. "If he ever did anything like that, Barney, I'd kill him if I went to the chair for it!" Pat knew that Barney's whole life was wrapped up in that girl of his, though he'd never met her. He started down the stairs once more. "Find out everything you can about what Sassoon's plans are; you've got a lot of wires out. I'll look into it too. And you talk to that Wanda. See if you can get her to go on a trip to Europe for a while."

"That's a damn good idea," Barney said. "A world cruise wouldn't hurt her—if I could get her to go."

"Hell!" Pat exclaimed. "You're her father, aren't you?"

Barney smiled wryly. "You don't know that girl, Pat. Wait'll you meet her. She's got a mind of her own!"

PAT DONNELLY stopped in at Zeitlen's all-night restaurant for a cup of coffee, and read the morning papers. Then he walked down the semi-deserted canyon of Broadway. The clock on the Paramount Building showed four-twenty. His long, loping stride ate up the short distance to the Croydon, on Forty-first, where he always stayed. He didn't bother with a cab, and he walked with an apparent carelessness of being followed that was deceitful.

Swell pickings, anyone not in the know might have thought; but those in the know could have told them about the Webley automatic with the specially built wide hand-grip in the aluminum clip under his coat.

They could tell about the time Pat Donnelly had bucked "Monk" Sassoon, the crooked gambling baron, just for the hell of it—or maybe with a deeper motive; and how Sassoon had backed down, saying. "Hell, Donnelly, I don't want to tangle with you—you got the devil's luck on your side!"

That story had an end to it, too. They always told the end: Sassoon's backing down had cost him prestige, had undermined the morale of his wide-spread organization. A month later the name of Sassoon no longer served to scare off competition in the Big Town. And Barney Rayman, who ran a square gambling house on the east side, had stepped in, taken over Sassoon's interests, and opened the palatial "Barney's Place."

"Of course," they would finish up with a wink, "it had nothing to do with it that Barney once staked Pat Donnelly to ten grand the time when Pat came back from Agua Caliente without a dime in his pocket. Oh, no!"

Pat's footsteps echoed hollowly on the pavement of the deserted thoroughfare. At Forty-fifth, a drunk was weaving his way erratically into the Astor. A milk

wagon rattled across Forty-sixth, making its way eastward. Beyond that there was no life on Broadway.

Pat walked with a lithe watchfulness, his eyes searching each darkened doorway before he passed it. At Forty-fourth, just before reaching the corner, he heard the roar of a car speeding toward Broadway. He stopped, several feet from the crossing, his body taut, his hand straying toward his shoulder clip. There was always the possibility that Sassoon had had spies at Barney's Place, who could tip him off when Pat left. Since everybody knew that Pat lived at the Croydon, it would be possible to plant a car with a submachine gun in it at a spot where they knew he would pass. The possibility was remote, but "Lucky" Pat Donnelly owed his continued good health to the fact that he seldom overlooked possibilities.

He moved swiftly over into the doorway of the shoe store just above the corner of Broadway and Forty-fourth, and his automatic was halfway out of the clip as the car swung around the corner on two wheels.

But the occupants of the car were not looking for Pat. There were three men in that sedan—one in the driver's seat, and two in the rear. They were staring ahead of them tensely, looking neither to the right nor left.

And Pat Donnelly recognized one of them.

There was no mistaking the big heavy shoulders, the broad flat face of "Monk" Sassoon. It was more than a year since Pat had seen Sassoon, but he would never forget that heavy, basilisk face that never smiled and never scowled. Sassoon wore no hat, and his hair, close-cropped, stood up in a short pompadour from his wide forehead.

Just a flash Pat got, and then the car had swung left into Broadway and was racing north. The tail light was out, but Pat caught the license number under the street lamp. Barney had said that no one knew where Sassoon was staying now; this might be a good way to trace him, and Pat took out pencil and a slip of paper, jotted it down.

The car had already disappeared up Broadway. Pat stepped out from the doorway, glanced around, and headed south again, crossing the street.

And it was then that he saw the girl.

She was just coming out of the Movieland cabaret, down in the middle of the block, on Broadway. The Movieland was, of course, closed and dark. The girl stepped quickly out of the lobby of the cabaret, stood on the sidewalk in apparent hesitation.

She started across toward a small black coupe parked at the curb, but stopped halfway to it, wavered in indecision. A street light illumined the soft, smooth whiteness of her face. She wore a green evening dress under a mink coat, and her black hair, which was not bobbed, was done up in a knot at the nape of her neck. Pat judged that she was no more than twenty, at the most.

As he approached her his eyes traveled appreciatively over her trim figure, exposed to his view by the open fur coat.

She had stopped short at the sound of his footsteps, and swiveled toward him. Her eyes remained on him, and as he got closer he thought he detected a sort of panic in them.

She suddenly stretched a hand out to him appealingly, and said in a voice which, though soft and cultured, carried through the empty stillness of the night:

"Excuse me. Would—would you—come in there with me?"

Pat frowned. "What do you want to go in there, for? The place is closed—"

She had already started back toward the half-open door. She threw back over her shoulder:

"I—I think there's a dead man in there!"

PAT swore under his breath, followed her into the darkness of the Movieland, hunching his left arm forward a bit, so as to bring the clip with the Webley within easier reach.

Just inside the door he made out her dark form, standing still. He could hear her breath coming fast as she bent over a huddled form on the floor at her feet.

He scraped a match lit, held it low. It illumined the body of a man, lying on his back. The arms were flung out. The head, with blood spreading from a vicious bullet wound in the left temple, was twisted to one side so that it rested on the right ear. The eyes were wide open, glazed.

Pat Donnelly heard a startled gasp from the girl as the match flared and went out.

In the blackness she exclaimed: "Kline! It's Steve Kline! I knew it! I—"

Pat's thoughts raced. Kline was the supposed owner of the Movieland. He was lying dead here, and only a few moments ago Pat had seen Sassoon, who was supposed to be backing this place, drive away at a furious pace.

His eyes traveled to a small, gun-metal automatic lying on the floor a foot or two away. The girl saw it, too, just as the second match went out.

In the short space of time that it took him to light the next match, Pat heard the soft rustle of the girl's dress as she moved, and then the light flared up to show her stooping, *picking up the automatic!*

Pat shouted:

"Hey! Don't touch that!"

But she already had it in her hand. She faced Pat, holding the automatic loosely at her side.

"Why shouldn't I?" she asked, coolly.

Pat groaned. "Drop it, quick! There might be prints on it. The killer's prints!"

Her face was white, drawn. She said, very low:

"They were my prints. I—killed Steve Kline!"

PAT'S jaw fell open in amazement.

A shadow filled the partly open door, cutting off the little light that came from the street lamp outside. A flashlight now speared into the darkness, settled on the girl. A heavy voice demanded:

"What's goin' on here?"

Pat recognized the voice of Joe Brophy, the cop who covered the beat. He said drily:

"Come in, Joe. It looks like a party."

Brophy swung the light to Pat's face for a moment, exclaimed:

"Hello, Mister Donnelly. What—"

He had been fingering along the wall for the electric switch, and now he found it, clicked it on. Light flooded the lobby. And Brophy saw the dead body.

"Holy Mother!" he exclaimed. "It's Steve Kline! Shot through the head!"

His gaze traveled from Pat Donnelly to the girl.

"Who killed him?"

"I did, officer!" The girl spoke clearly, firmly. "I shot him with this gun!"

She held out the automatic, butt first. "You'll find my fingerprints on it!"

As in a daze, Brophy took the gun by the barrel. He glanced inquiringly at Pat, who shrugged. He was sure the girl hadn't done it. But there was nothing he could do about it. The girl admitted the killing—even claimed it, so to speak. She seemed to be in her right mind; it was her own funeral....

Brophy cleared his throat. He said:

"Well, miss, I guess I'll have to take you in. Better come outside. I'll hail the prowl car; it's due to come by here in a minute or two."

He took her by the arm, led her out, calling to Pat:

"Come on out, Mister Donnelly. I guess you'll have to wait around here, too."

Pat said: "Okay, Joe."

He waited till they were both out, then stooped swiftly and picked up a small brass object that he had spied on the floor, just beside the head of Steve Kline. It was smeared with blood, and he wiped it on the dead man's shirt, holding it gingerly by the one edge that was clean. It was a round brass check about the size of a Canadian penny, and on it were the words: "CLUB PARADISE," followed by the numeral 19.

Pat stuck the check in his vest pocket, came outside in time to hear the girl saying in a listless voice to Brophy:

"That's my coupe. I came here to see Steve Kline. I—I had a quarrel with him, and shot him. That's all there is to it."

Brophy was staring at her half unbelievably.

Pat came up close behind her, asked:

"How did you know Kline was going to be here at this late hour?"

She turned to him, bit her lip, and her eyes avoided Pat's. "I—I—he called me, told me to meet him here. I—"

She stopped as a green police coupe cruising up Broadway swung in toward the curb, pulled up at Brophy's signal. Brophy said to the bluecoat who got out:

"Phone in to the House, Ned. It's a murder. Steve Kline. This girl here, confessed. I got the gun—" He turned to the girl. "What's your name, miss?"

And Pat Donnelly got the shock of his life. For the girl said:

"My name is Wanda May Rayman!"

Pat's face went white. Brophy whistled. "Any relation of Barney Rayman?"

She nodded. "I'm Barney Rayman's daughter!"

Chapter II

Fifty-to-One!

IT was twenty minutes before Detective Sergeant Breitwell, of homicide, got there. The man from the medical examiner's office had beat him to it, and was waiting impatiently.

When Breitwell came out of the lobby, he was scowling. Pat Donnelly, who had known him since he was a second-grade detective, took him to one side.

"How does it check, Leo?"

Breitwell was a thin man, a head and a half shorter than Pat. He was extremely nervous, high-strung at all times; but an excellent policeman in spite of that.

He looked up now, at Pat, then threw a side-glance at Wanda Rayman, who was sitting in the headquarters car with another plainclothesman. He shook his head.

"It checks all right, Pat," he said slowly. "The M. E. got the slug out of Kline. It's a twenty-two. Same as the gun the girl turned in—"

"You mean," Pat interrupted, "that it's the same as the gun the girl *picked up*. Don't forget, I saw her pick it up."

Breitwell threw him a queer glance. "Look, Pat," he said earnestly. "I know you're a friend of Barney's, and this hits you pretty close. Everybody knows you'd go to the front for Barney every time, but you're up against a stone wall this trip. It's open and shut. The girl's confession—"

"Means nothing, and you know it," Pat told him coldly. "Murder's the one charge where you can't convict a defendant on a confession alone. You've got to have evidence—"

"That's true, Pat. But this won't be a murder charge. She's a pretty girl, and the P. A. will know it's tough to get a jury to give a pretty girl the chair. So what'll he do? He'll take her plea to first degree manslaughter—twenty years, in this state. And there won't be any question on that. Everybody in town except Barney himself, knows that Barney's daughter has been running around for the past six months with Steve Kline. The story's there, plain. He two-timed her or something, and she meets him and has a scrap, and lets him have it. Then she drops the gun, scared, and runs out. She figures they'd pick her up anyway, so she waits till some one comes along instead of trying to cop a sneak—"

Pat grunted. "That's the way it looks to a dumb cop, Leo. But I'll lay fifty to one that she didn't kill Kline!"

Breitwell's eyes sparkled. "I'll take a hundred bucks worth of that, Pat!"

Pat Donnelly glared at him. "Done, Leo!" he said softly. "And I'll win that bet if I have to confess to killing Kline myself!"

Breitwell's bright eyes studied him a moment. "Damned if I don't think you would!" he said under his breath.

PAT left him, walked over to the head-quarters car where Wanda was sitting, and bent close to her. "Tell me, kid," he asked. "Were you at the Club Paradise tonight?"

He could see that she was under a great strain. She sat stiffly, with her hands clasped tight in her lap. Her clear blue eyes met his.

"No," she said. "I wasn't."

He leaned even closer, put a big hand on her two small ones. "Why do you claim you killed Kline?" he demanded. "You know damned well you didn't. Whom are you trying to cover up for?"

Her lower lip trembled. "Please! Let me alone. I tell you I killed him. I killed him! Don't you understand?"

Pat scowled. "You did, like hell. There's something fishy—"

He stopped as an agonized cry sounded behind him.

"Wanda! Wanda darling! What's this about you killing Kline? Wanda—"

Pat swung about, put both hands on the shoulders of little Barney Rayman, who had just got out of a taxicab. Barney's face was flushed, there were beads of sweat on his forehead and on the backs of his hands. Behind Barney stood Vic, one of his two bodyguards.

Pat Donnelly said huskily:

"Take it easy, Barney. Wanda didn't do it, though she says she did. I promise you I'll clear her, and turn up the real murderer inside of twenty-four hours."

Barney looked up hopefully at the stern, set features of Pat Donnelly. Suddenly he sighed. "If you say so, Pat—"

But the girl's voice interrupted. She was clutching at Pat's sleeve, and when he turned to her he saw that her eyes were snapping. "Please stay out of this!" she exclaimed. "Can't you leave us alone? You'll do no good by meddling!"

Barney said in an agonized voice: "But Wanda, dear! Don't you understand? They'll send you to jail. They may even—" his voice broke. He turned away and buried his head in his arms.

The girl looked at her father strangely, as if she were seeing him for the first time in her life. She said softly:

"It's all right, Dad. Don't worry—"

Pat turned away, went over to Breitwell, took his arm and led him aside. He took out the brass check. "I found this next to the body, Leo," he said. "The girl didn't kill Kline. Whoever shot him, must have pulled this check out with the gun, and dropped it on the floor. Find out who checked a hat and coat at the Club Paradise on this check, and you've got your man. And I can give a good guess who it is. I saw Sassoon driving away from around the corner, two minutes before I met the girl. Catch on?"

Breitwell took the check, grunted. "You had a hell of a nerve picking it up, Pat. What was the idea?"

Pat grinned. "I thought maybe it belonged to the girl. Frankly, I didn't want to leave too much evidence against her lying around. I didn't believe her guilty even before I knew she was Barney's daughter."

"You're not making this up, now, Pat—about the check, I mean? You know this is murder. You shouldn't fool around with murder."

"I'm not making it up, Leo. What do you think of our bet now?"

Breitwell grunted. "Let's go to the Club Paradise," he said.

Chapter III

Strapped to the Chair!

IT was five-twenty a.m. The Club Paradise, on West Fifty-sixth Street, was closed, of course. But Pat Donnelly hammered on the door until old Mike Sligo, the night watchman, came out to them, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Mike was over sixty, and fat. He opened the door with one hand, while he pulled the suspenders up over his shoulders with the other.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "If it ain't 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly. And Detective Sergeant Breitwell!"

Pat took Mike Sligo by the arm, propelled him inside, with Breitwell following. Almost tacitly, the detective sergeant had given the lead in this matter to the tall, slim gambler.

Pat said to Sligo: "What time did you come to work this morning, Mike?"

Sligo looked at him queerly, grumbled:

"Is that what ye woke me up to find out? This is a hell of a note!" Then, noticing the taut expression in Pat's face, he answered sullenly: "I come on at four A. M.—over an hour ago. But why—"

"Did you see Monk Sassoon here? Now think carefully, Mike. A lot depends on that."

Breitwell added: "And don't be afraid to tell the truth, Mike. We'll protect you—"

Sligo flared up. "Since when did Mike Sligo need protecting by whippersnappers like you? O' course I'll tell the truth." He swung his old eyes to Pat.

"No, Pat. I didn't see Sassoon here at all, at all. Not since I came on. The club closed less'n a hour ago, an' I see everybody who came out. There wasn't no Sassoon—bad cess to that crook!"

Pat's shoulders sagged as he turned a hopeless glance at Breitwell. The detective sergeant shook his head commiseratingly. "You see, Pat, a clue isn't always a clue. This check might have come from Kline's pocket as well as from Sassoon's. But if it did, Mike here wouldn't know about it. Kline would have been here before Mike came on duty."

Pat said suddenly: "Take us into the coat room, Mike!"

Sligo looked from one to the other, shrugged, and turned, led the way through the lobby into the little foyer where the cloak room was. Pat pulled open the Dutch door, snapped on the lights, and grabbed at a hat that hung on a peg under number nineteen. It was the only piece of clothing in the cloak room, and Pat's eyes glittered as he examined the hat, with Breitwell.

He turned it over in his hand, and suddenly he felt his blood freeze. An empty feeling came into the pit of his stomach, and he gazed blankly at Breitwell.

There were initials in the hatband. And those initials were—*B.R.!*

Pat could see Breitwell's shrewd bright eyes sparkling as his nimble mind leaped from one conclusion to another. His lips moved and formed the name that those initials stood for.

"*B.R.—Barney Rayman!*" he said under his breath. "Now I get it. That's why the girl was so eager to confess. She's covering up for Barney. She knows he killed Kline, and she figures that as a girl she could get a better break from a jury than her father!"

PAT'S mind was numb for a moment, refusing to accept the situation. "Damn it, Leo," he said, "Barney *couldn't* have killed Kline. I only left him—"

"Yes?" Breitwell asked triumphantly. "You left him—when?"

"At a quarter to four."

Breitwell nodded. "There's a half hour's difference. You must have gone in Zeitlen's, like you usually do. Barney had plenty of time to come here, after closing up his own place. Maybe while he was here he learned something about the way Kline was running around with Wanda. He got hot under the collar, and went off the handle—"

Pat snorted. "Hell, Leo. All you do is start a new theory every time you see a clue. You forget that I saw Sassoon driving away from there. How do you fit that in with your theory? What about Sassoon?"

Breitwell regarded Pat speculatively. "You *say* you saw Sassoon, Pat—" he raised a hand as Pat's face flushed a deep red—"now don't get sore. I'm a cop, and I have to look at all the angles. I know you, Pat Donnelly, and I know how far you'd go for a friend. I don't hold it against you. It's swell to have friends like that. But the law is the law, Pat. And everything points to Barney. If you hadn't been out of town for almost a year, you'd have heard the stories about Wanda and Kline, like everybody else. They've been running around together for quite a while, and you know what Barney thinks of Kline. You can just imagine him when he found out about them."

Breitwell shook his head, sighed. "I'm sorry, but I've got to go and take Barney in—"

"Wait a minute, Leo," Pat begged. "Before you do that, let's look this up a little further." He swung to Sligo, who had remained outside the Dutch door, watching them.

"Who's the hat check girl that works here, Mike? You know her?"

Sligo nodded slowly. "Daisy Filene. She and another girl have an apartment down the street. I don't know the number, but it's next to the garage. I—"

Pat seized Breitwell by the arm. "Come on, Leo."

He dragged the detective out, and down the street. There was beginning to be a little light now, and the street lamps were out. The dawn looked grey and bleak. Here and there a man was hurrying on the way to an early job.

Breitwell grunted, almost running to keep up with Pat's swift pace.

The house next to the garage was a four-story brick that had seen better days, but was now converted into one- and two-room apartments.

Pat found a bell in the vestibule which carried two names: Filene and Miles. It was marked: "1A."

He tried the outer door, found it locked, glanced at Breitwell, who said:

"Hell, go on and ring it."

Pat put his thumb on the button, kept it there for almost five minutes. They could hear the raucous jangle of the bell in an apartment on the ground floor, and after a while the buzzer sounded quite viciously. Pat pushed the door open, and started down the hall with Breitwell after him, and a door at the rear was pulled open.

A woman in pink pajamas peered out at them, demanded irritably:

"What's the big idea? Who the hell are you?"

Breitwell flashed his badge. "You Daisy Filene?"

She stared at the badge suspiciously, keeping behind the door. "What if I am?"

"Get some clothes on and let us in. We want to talk to you. I'm Detective Sergeant Breitwell from homicide."

She glanced from Breitwell to Pat Donnelly's tall, slim figure, and said:

"I got enough clothes on. You can come in."

She stepped aside, pulled the door open.

Daisy Filene was a blonde. Her hair was done in little curls all around the back of her head from ear to ear. Her complexion was creamy, and she was well made up. She stood in the middle of the room, put her hands on her hips, and let them look at her in her pajamas. Her eyes flashed to Pat, and she smiled invitingly.

"You're 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly, ain't you?"

Pat nodded.

She sighed. "Gee, I wish you'd make a couple of bets or something for me. I could use money. Look at this dump—"

Breitwell interrupted her impatiently. "Never mind that. Where's your roommate—the girl who shares this place with you?"

Daisy Filene hesitated a moment, then said: "She ain't here. She's staying at her mother's tonight. What'd you gents want—her or me?"

Breitwell walked past her, pushed open the bathroom door, peered in, then came back.

"Do you remember who checked a hat with you tonight at the Club Paradise—and didn't claim it?"

She nodded. "Yeah. It was number nineteen. I left it hanging there, figuring he'd come back tomorrow to get it." She glanced at Pat. "It belongs to your friend, Barney Rayman."

Pat stepped close to her. "You sure Barney checked that hat with you?"

"Sure I am. He came in about four o'clock, just floating around, I guess, after closing up; said something about being taken over by 'Lucky' Pat Donnelly for thirty-two thousand, and breezed into the bar. About ten minutes later he came out, all hot and mad, and he didn't even stop for his hat—just barged out of the place, talkin' under his breath. I called after him, but he didn't even hear me."

BREITWELL let out his breath in a long "Whew!" He took the hat out of his overcoat pocket, where he had stuffed it, and showed it to her.

"This the hat?" he asked.

"That's it!" she said. "That's the hat. But what's the idea? Did you wake me up in the middle of the night to identify a hat?"

Pat Donnelly turned away from her, looked around the room. The bed was disarranged, the pillow mussed, as if it had been slept on. The second pillow, next to it, was fresh and untouched. On a chair near the bed lay a little pile of feminine garments. A pair of long tan silk stockings hung on the string of the shade, drying in the open window. Everything seemed natural enough.

But his eyes swung back to Daisy Filene, and he studied her smoothly made-up face, her neatly curled hair.

"Were you sleeping, Daisy?" he asked softly.

She threw him a startled glance. But she smiled at once—acidly.

"Yes, Hawkshaw, I was sleeping. Take a look at the bed!"

Breitwell said wearily: "That's all, Pat. I guess you can't put up any more arguments." He jerked his head at the woman in the pajamas. "You, Filene! Don't leave town. You'll be wanted for the Grand Jury in a couple of days."

Her eyes opened. "Grand Jury! Why, what—"

Pat laughed harshly. "You knew damn well what it's about. It's about murder—the murder of Steve Kline. And by what you've just told Breitwell here, you're practically strapping one of the whitest men in the world into the electric chair." He brought his face close to hers, and she half drew back at the fierceness of him. "You've put the finger on Barney Rayman for the murder of Kline. And if I find out you're lying, Daisy—" his voice sank low, became deep with restrained emotion—"God help you!"

He swung away from her, headed for the door. "Come on, Leo. Let's get out of here!"

For a moment his body hid the door which he had pulled open, and his long supple fingers flicked in and out, pressed the safety-catch button which controlled the lock. The door could now be opened from the outside by merely turning the knob.

Daisy Filene didn't notice his swift motion. She followed them to the door silently, her eyes sullenly fixed on Pat Donnelly's back. When they were both out in the hallway, she slammed the door.

Pat manipulated the catch of the vestibule door too, without Breitwell's noticing it, and they passed out into the street.

The detective sergeant said mournfully: "It looks like I lose that bet, Pat. The girl certainly didn't kill Kline. Her old man did. I owe you a hundred."

Pat said tightly: "What are you going to do, Leo?"

Breitwell shrugged. "What can I do? I'm going to take Barney in. The evidence is all here."

Pat planted himself in front of the sergeant. "Listen, Leo," he said desperately. "That Filene dame wasn't telling the truth. She wasn't sleeping when we rang the bell. My bet is that there was some one in that room with her, who climbed out the window when they heard us. She made a quick change into pajamas, and messed up the bed so it's look like she slept in it." He poked a long finger into Breitwell's chest. "I bet you further, that if we go back now, we'll surprise that party in her room again—he's probably come in through the window again."

Breitwell shrugged. "What'll it prove, Pat? It's her apartment. She's got a right to entertain anyone she likes—even at five in the morning. If you find anyone with her, it won't change her story any."

Pat subsided. "All right," he said, dully. "Go ahead. I suppose you've got to act according to the evidence."

"Coming along?" the detective asked.

"No. I couldn't stand seeing Barney booked for murder. I'm going to look up a couple of angles of this thing. By the way—have you got any handcuffs on you?"

Breitwell nodded, looking at him suspiciously. "What do you want cuffs for?"

Pat grinned slowly. "Maybe I'll run into the real murderer tonight." He put a hand on the other's arm as Breitwell gestured impatiently, started to walk away.

"I'm asking you to lend me your handcuffs, Leo. You turning me down on a little thing like that?"

"Oh, hell!" the sergeant exclaimed. "Here, take the damn things!" He yanked them out of his back pocket, thrust them at Pat. "Go chain yourself to a lamppost!"

Pat watched him go down the street and get into the car which he had left before the Club Paradise, watched him drive away.

Then he turned, walked swiftly back into the brownstone house where Daisy Filene lived.

Chapter IV

Too Many Confessions.

PAT DONNELLY kept close to the wall of the hallway as he approached Apartment 1A. From behind the door he heard the hum of subdued voices—a man's, and a woman's.

He put the handcuffs in his pocket, eased the Webley out of its clip, and with his left hand turned the knob slowly. He got the door open an inch, heard the voices louder. And suddenly the conversation inside stopped dead.

Pat flung the door wide, thrust into the room, and slammed the door behind him.

Daisy Filene was sitting on the bed with her legs crossed and smoking a cigarette. She had been in the middle of taking a puff, and she sat there frozen like that, staring at Pat, holding the cigarette at her lips. Smoke was coming from her nostrils, and suddenly she choked on it, began to cough.

Near the kitchenette stood a man whom Pat knew. He had his hand at his armpit holster, and a gun was halfway out. There was a snarl of fury on his face, and he was crouched forward, his knees slightly bent. He didn't move as Pat's Webley covered him, and slowly he let his hand come away from the holster—empty.

Pat said tonelessly: "So you're a double-crossing murderer, Smoky!"

Smoky's voice was husky. "God, no, Pat. I didn't kill Kline!"

"I say you did, Smoky. A guy who could double-cross a white boss like Barney, could be a murderer." Pat laughed shortly. "So that's what Barney gets for trusting you! Supposed to be his bodyguard! I wondered where you were, when Barney showed up before with only Vic, and not you!"

Daisy Filene's coughing spasm was over. She got up from the bed, eyes blazing. "Smoky's no murderer!"

Pat laughed again. "Maybe not! But he's the one that brought you Barney's hat to hang in the coatroom. He's the one that coached you to say Barney'd been there." He spoke to the woman, but kept his eyes on the man. "You gave Smoky the check for that hat to give to the murderer—if he didn't kill Kline himself."

Smoky said very low: "You're crazy, Donnelly."

"Then what are you doing here?" Pat asked flatly.

Smoky lowered his eyes, but the woman said sullenly: "Smoky's my husband."

"I get it," said Pat. He reached behind him, pulled the door open a little, and shot the catch that operated the lock. Then he slammed the door closed again, stepped across the room toward Smoky.

Smoky's eyes were on the Webley, fascinated, and he made no move to resist when Pat reached in and took out his automatic, dropped it in his own pocket.

Then Pat put away the Webley. "All right, Smoky," he said pleasantly. "We're going to have a little talk, you and I, as man to man. You're going to tell me the whole story of what happened tonight—and you're going to tell it fast."

Daisy Filene said quickly: "Don't talk, Smoky. He's nobody. He's only a gambler that thinks he's a big shot. He's got nothing on you, and he's bluffing. We got a right to be here. All I got to do is yell for the cops, and we'll be okay."

Pat stood loosely, arms at his sides, and grinned at Smoky.

Smoky shuddered.

"If you think she's right, Smoky." Pat said silkily, "you can act accordingly. If she calls out for help I give you my word that I'll shoot you right between the eyes. Barney is my friend, Smoky, and you know I always keep my word." His hand moved up swiftly, and the Webley reappeared. "What do *you* think, Smoky. Will I kill you if you don't talk?"

The woman bared her teeth, stepped closer to Pat. "You're crazy! You kill Smoky, and you'll fry! He hasn't even got a gun on him now. It'd be murder. You'll fry, I tell you, you'll fry!"

"All right," Pat said. "I'll fry. But it won't do Smoky any good, because he'll be dead."

Daisy Filene looked at him unbelievably, said: "Nobody's nuts enough for that," and opened her mouth to scream.

Pat's face was white and tense. His fist swung in a short arc, caught her on the chin, sent her toppling back onto the bed, unconscious.

Smoky had taken a step forward, but he stopped as Pat's gun swung to cover him again, and Pat asked coldly: "Well?"

Pat's hand was steady, but the collar of his shirt was wet with sweat. His face was a set mask, and his finger perceptibly tautened on the trigger.

Smoky exclaimed hastily: "I'll talk!"

"No," said Pat. "You'll write!"

WITH Pat Donnelly standing grimly over him, Smoky wrote in pencil on a cardboard taken from a laundered shirt—the only thing they had been able to find in the room that could be written on. Smoky's left hand was cuffed to the chair, and he wrote awkwardly with his right.

Daisy Filene was still unconscious on the bed, and Pat left her so, watching the laboriously shaped words take form under Smoky's pencil. Smoky sat at the table, with Pat just behind him, facing the door.

Pat had locked the window and pulled down the shade. The statement was:

"I, Sam Miles, also known as Smoky Miles, state that I was employed as a bodyguard by Barney Rayman. That I am legally married to Daisy Filene Miles, who works as a hat-check girl at the Club Paradise. That Daisy was approached by an unknown man who offered her a thousand dollars if she

would get me to take Barney's hat and bring it to the check room last night. I did so. This man also made Daisy call up Miss Wanda Rayman at her home and tell her that there was trouble between her father and Steve Kline at the Movieland Cabaret, and that she better go there at once if she wanted to stop some one from getting hurt. We didn't know what was in back of it. We thought some one was being framed or something, but we didn't think it was murder. We only found out about that afterward, when the same man came back and gave us an extra thousand and told us that we better keep our mouths shut or we'd burn, because some one had been killed at the Movieland, and we'd be accessories."

Smoky stopped, looked up.

"All right," Pat said. "Now the name of the man."

Smoky wiped sweat from under his eyes. "I swear to you, Donnelly, I don't know who it was. He never give no name."

"Do you know Sassoon when you see him?"

"No. I came from Chicago and got the job with Barney after Sassoon left this town. I never seen him."

"What did this man look like?"

"He—"

Smoky stopped, glanced toward the door. Some one had rapped on it discreetly.

Pat whispered: "Find out who it is."

Smoky called out: "Yes?"

A voice said: "Is Daisy Filene there?"

Pat recognized the voice—even over a lapse of more than a year. It was the cold, unemotional voice of "Monk" Sassoon. Pat stooped, unlocked the cuffs.

Then he whispered some instructions in Smoky's ear, snatched up the confession from the table, and stepped behind the curtain of the kitchenette.

Smoky called out: "Who wants her?"

"This is the man who talked to her last night. Open up. I've got to see you. It's important."

Smoky said: "Okay," and went to the door, opened it.

Pat applied his eye to a crack in the curtain, and his mouth set in a grim line as he saw the hulking form of Sassoon come into the room, followed by two more men—the same men that Pat had seen in the car earlier in the evening.

"Monk" Sassoon's thick features were wreathed into something like a smile. He jerked his head at one of the men who had come in after him, and that man shut the door, stood with his back to it.

Then Sassoon turned, surveyed the room, towering over Smoky. His eyes lit on the form of Daisy Filene on the bed. She was coming to, and moaning a bit. There was a blue mark on her jaw.

Sassoon smiled crookedly. "Having a little spat, eh? Couldn't figure out how to divide all that money, I bet."

Smoky said nervously: "What can I do for you, mister?"

Sassoon asked genially: "Had any visitors yet? Cops or such?"

Smoky hesitated only a fraction of a second, then said quickly: "No. No one's been here at all."

"That's fine," Sassoon purred. "Because I've been thinking that maybe you or Daisy might be tempted to talk about things. That's funny, though, because the night watchman over at the Club Paradise tells me that a man named Donnelly was there to see him, together with a detective, and that they said they would stop in here too."

"Oh yes," Smoky said lamely. He wasn't much of a liar. "They did come here, but I lammed out the window. Daisy talked to them. She told them the story you told her to tell."

"So? That's very nice. Just as I figured it. Did the detective have a hat with him?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Now I just want to make sure that you and Daisy don't talk any more about this thing. You see, she's identified the hat, and that's all that'll be necessary."

"We won't talk, mister," Smoky assured him. "We'll keep mum."

"I'm very sure you will," Sassoon said softly. "Quite sure."

He nodded, and suddenly the two men behind him moved forward, and guns appeared in their hands; guns with ungainly silencers on the muzzles. Their eyes glittered as one stepped toward Smoky, the other went toward the bed on which lay Daisy Filene.

Smoky exclaimed huskily: "Say! What you gonna do?"

"Just make sure," Sassoon murmured, "that you don't do any more talking."

Suddenly panic seized Smoky. He turned wildly, clawing at his empty holster. And Pat Donnelly stepped out from behind the curtain.

Illustration:

Pat stepped from behind the curtain.

Sassoon saw him, and froze. But the other two men had their backs to him, and he had to attract their attention by coughing. Sassoon's face was twisted into a mask of hatred as his hand streaked to his coat pocket. He shouted hoarsely:

"It's Donnelly! Take him!"

The two men whirled just as Sassoon got his gun out. Pat fired first at Sassoon, then twice more, swiftly, at the other two men. None of them fired a single shot. Pat's first slug had caught Sassoon in the arm, and the big man had dropped his gun, face contorted with pain.

Pat's second and third slugs hurled the two men backward into the window, where they crashed against the shade, carrying it back against the pane and smashing the glass. They were both dead, with bullets through their hearts.

There was a commotion outside, heavy steps sounded in the hall, and Detective Sergeant Breitwell fairly hurled himself into the room, service revolver in his hand.

He stopped short just inside the door, goggling at the dead bodies, at the figure of Sassoon who was trying to get to his feet and to hold on to his wounded arm at the same time. "Hell, Pat," he said. "I figured you were up to something here—so I hustled over."

Pat said to Breitwell: "Here's the murderer of Kline, Leo. Meet Mr. Sassoon!"

Sassoon growled: "You're nuts. I don't know what you're talking about!"

Breitwell glanced at Pat, and suddenly started to smile.

"What the hell are you grinning about?" Pat demanded.

"I'll tell you," said Breitwell. "First Wanda Rayman claims she killed Kline. Then I go down and release her and take Barney Rayman in custody, and he seems tickled to death, and claims he killed Kline. It's a relief to find some one who denies he killed Kline!"

"Sassoon," Pat said quietly, "was always modest." He took the written confession from his pocket. "This statement, written by Smoky just before he got here, will put him in the headlines—and send him right to the chair..."

