

In this Corner - Death

by Emile C. Tepperman, 1899-1951

Published: 1943
in »Ten Detective Aces«

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 ... thru ... Chapter 5

♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠ ♠

Chapter 1

DRIVING down Central Park West on Monday morning, Tom Atherton suddenly realized why he had been feeling restless and discontented for the last few weeks. By rights, he should have been supremely satisfied with himself. He was a young and successful real estate lawyer. His income, after three years of practice, was now large enough so that he and Sally Blaine had been able to set their wedding date for the early part of May. He was a respected member of the Bar, and they were even talking of running him for the Assembly in the 1943 elections. But Tom Atherton wasn't happy. As he automatically tooled the coupé down Central Park West, his big hands tightened on the wheel, and he found his thoughts dipping fondly back to the years preceding his admission to the Bar. In those days he had worked his way through Law School by boxing every Friday night in semi-pro bouts all around New York. Tom's manager, old Jerry Flynn, had almost cried when Tom quit boxing to take his bar exams.

„Tommy, my boy, it's breaking my old heart you are. You're throwin' away the makings of the heavyweight champion of the world. And for what? For a dusty law office! Stick with me, Tommy, and I'll make you champ in three years!“ But Tom Atherton, with high resolve, had put all that behind him, and become a respected attorney. Now he pushed his foot down savagely on the gas and sent the coupé spurting through traffic, wishing he'd taken Jerry Flynn's advice. He was bored—fed up with humdrum existence.

And abruptly—as if the gods had favored his wish—Tom Atherton's humdrum existence came to an end.

There was a pigeon-blue sedan ahead of him proceeding very slowly and straddling the white line in the middle of the street so that it was impossible to pass. Tom scowled with impatience, and put a finger on the horn button to honk it out of the way. But just as he was about to press the button, he noticed something very queer about that pigeon-blue sedan.

There were four men in it, two in front and two in back. All of them, including the driver, were visible to Tom through their rear window. He could see that they were peering very tensely to the right, in the direction of a large and expensive apartment house. A stocky man in a dark suit and a panama hat was coming out of that house, lighting a cigar.

The thing that made Tom Atherton catch his breath was the fact that one of the men in the rear seat had the window open, and was pushing a queer-looking instrument out. Tom had never seen a real sub-machine gun, except in the movies. But he recognized this. It was pointing directly at the stocky man in the panama hat.

The machine gunner in the pigeon-blue sedan was twisting around sideways and sighting along the gun, with his finger on the trip.

Trained to quick instinctive responses to danger by his ring experience, Tom was already reacting without thought of his personal safety. He stepped down hard on the gas, sending his coupé forward like a shot. He swung to the right, bringing him alongside the pigeon-blue sedan. Then he twisted the wheel violently to the left.

The left end of his bumper tore into the running-board of the sedan at the very moment when the gunner let loose the first burst from the sub-machine gun, filling the air with its rapid, staccato drumbeat of murder.

But Tom's swift maneuver achieved its purpose. The crash of his coupé jotted the sedan hard, The muzzle of the machine gun was thrown violently upward,

so that the hail of lead spattered into the air instead of cutting the stocky man in two as had been intended.

Tom didn't see what the stocky man was doing, for his own hands were suddenly full. The four in the pigeon-blue sedan turned their attention to him. The gunner swung the muzzle of the weapon around to bear on Tom, and his finger pulled the trip again.

Tom Atherton's blood was racing with jubilant excitement. His bumper was locked with the sedan's running board, so that his window was in line with the rear window of the sedan through which the gun muzzle was pointing. He twisted his door handle and flung the door open violently at the same instant that the gunner pulled the trip of the machine gun.

Lead blasted from the muzzle, but it was sharply deflected by the opening door. Instead of riddling Tom, the scorching lead spattered into the framework of the coupé.

At the same time, Tom Atherton leaped out from behind the wheel and put his whole body behind a straight-arm jab into the gunner's face. He hit the man in the mouth and the fellow's head slammed backward. He let go of the machine gun, and it toppled out the window to the running-board at Tom's feet.

The gunmen yelled and scrambled out of the car on the opposite side. Tom jumped out from between the two cars, coming around after them.

Then a police radio car siren uttered a shrill scream and came tearing into Central Park West from a side street two blocks south.

The gunman swung around in sudden alarm. One of them yelled something in a foreign language.

The four of them turned and ran across the street to the park. They vaulted the stone wall and disappeared into the shrubbery on the other side.

The police car pulled up with screaming tires, and two bluecoats emerged with drawn guns. There were several spectators around, and they pointed in the direction taken by the fugitives. The cops went over the wall after them and the crowd thronged to the fence to watch the chase.

FOR the moment, Tom Atherton was forgotten. Not a soul was looking at him. In the distance, there were other radio car sirens, but all traffic on Central Park West was halted and everybody was absorbed in the chase that was going on in the park.

Tom threw a quick glance over toward the apartment house, but the stocky man in the panama hat was gone. Tom frowned. He knew who that stocky man was. He had seen the man's pictures in the papers many times. Gustave Bennetz had been tried for sedition more than a year ago, and had been acquitted by a fluke, together with five or six other defendants.

His picture had cropped up in the papers only this week again, in connection with the current trial of one of his friends in the state court, on a charge of having stolen weapons from a State Guard Armory.

Ruefully, Tom Atherton realized that he had risked his life to save a most unsavory character. There had been ugly rumors of vicious murders and reprisals being carried out by secret branches of foreign organizations. And the papers had printed a long statement by Gustave Bennetz, to the effect that a certain secret society, was really responsible for the crime for which his friend was being tried.

Tom told himself that he certainly shouldn't have stepped into this feud. He didn't want any publicity like this, because he knew how it would affect the few clients he now had. He threw a quick look around and saw that he was unobserved.

He dropped the machine gun and slid into his coupé. He stepped on the starter and backed up, ripping it out of the fender lock with the pigeon-blue sedan. Then he threw the car in first and shot forward. In a moment he rounded the corner.

He sped west for two blocks, then turned north on Amsterdam Avenue. He breathed a sigh of relief to think that he was well out of the mess. He turned on his dashboard radio, tuned it in on police signals, thinking that he would enjoy listening to the reports on the fray. He drove for ten minutes, and then his equanimity was rudely shattered as a police announcer's voice blasted from the radio:

„Signal thirty-three! Black coupé, license number 8V 282! Attention, all cars! Cars 21, 22 and 26 converge on Amsterdam between 72nd and 86th. Apprehend driver of this coupe, believed to be dangerous killer. This man just escaped after gunfight on Central Park West. Use caution. He may be armed and dangerous. Coupé has bullet marks from machine gun...“

Tom Atherton felt a queer sensation up and down his spine.

That alarm was for him. He—Tom Atherton—was being called a dangerous killer. And the machine-gun bullets. He had forgotten them. Any policeman he passed would notice them.

He pulled over to the curb to give himself a chance to think. He had been a fool to run away. Better to have adverse publicity than to be hunted as a killer. The thing to do was to go back and explain.

He reached the decision and immediately started to carry it out. He shifted to first and prepared to turn around and drive back. He started to pull away from the curb. There was a long low hiss of escaping air. The car settled down on the left side. With a frown, Tom got out and went around in front. Sure enough, the left front tire was flat. The crushed fender had cut into it as he drove.

There was no sense in stopping to change the tire now. There was a drug store diagonally across the street. Tom started across, deciding to phone headquarters at once to tell them the truth about the fracas on Central Park West.

But just as he got started across the street, a cruising police car came racing around the far corner. Abruptly it swerved into the curb as the policeman alongside the driver pointed toward Tom's coupé.

The police car screeched to a stop. A cop leaped out with a service revolver in his hand. He ran up to the coupé and looked inside, then turned disgustedly and called to his partner:

„It's the car, all right, Mac. But the guy's gone. Ditched it!“

Tom's first instinct was to go over and tell the policemen who he was. In fact, he had already started toward them, when Mac shouted from the police car, „We better get that guy before those Greeks get him. If they lay their hands on him, there won't be enough left of him to question!“

Tom Atherton's jaw hardened. So he wouldn't be through even after he explained to the cops! The rumors had been founded upon truth then! If there was some sort of secret Greek society bent on exterminating suspected pro-

Nazis, they'd surely believe he was in league with Bennetz. Tom Atherton would never have peace!

Automatically he kept going across the street and entered the drug store. An idea was beginning to shape itself in his mind. He went into the phone booth and dialed Spring 7-3100.

„Police Headquarters?“ he said when he got his connection. „This is Thomas Atherton, an attorney. I want to report my car was stolen this morning!“

„You'll have to go to your precinct station and report it in person,“ he was told.

„All right,“ Tom said, „I just wanted you to make a record of it.“

He hung up, feeling clever. He had known that they would tell him to go to the precinct house. He wouldn't go there till the evening, but meantime the supposed theft was on the record. Now they'd keep on looking for an unidentified gunman whom they would never find.

Very much satisfied with himself, Tom went out of the store and almost collided with the bluecoat, who was hurrying in to report finding the coupe.

Tom walked across to Broadway and took the subway down to his office on Worth Street. His mind, as the train rumbled on, was upon the fight in Central Park West. It was several minutes before he realized that he was being observed.

Two men were sitting at the end of the car, watching him. He had not seen them when he entered the car, so they must have come in behind him. They were big fellows with swarthy complexions. One of them wore a black derby, while the other had a gray slouch hat. The one with the derby had a nick in his right ear, as if a bullet or a knife had taken a piece off it. The one in the slouch hat was chewing a toothpick.

They both had their hands in the pockets of their topcoats. When they saw that Tom Atherton had noticed them, they both got up, crossed the aisle and sat down on either side of Tom. There were four or five other passengers in the car, but no one seemed to pay any attention to them.

They both pressed up close against Tom. He could feel the pressure of the guns in their pockets.

„Good morning, my very good friend,“ said the one in the derby. „Packy wants to see you.“

Tom frowned. „Who's Packy?“ he asked.

The one in the derby started to laugh very heartily. He leaned across Tom and shouted to his partner above the rumble of the subway train. „He wants to know who's Packy! What you think of that, Achilles?“

The one who had been addressed as Achilles did not laugh. He gave Tom a sour look and said to the other, „I theenk we geete heem those works right here, hah, Julius? W'at's the use breenging heem to Packy? We geeve heem one-two shoots right now. Weeth the loud noise een thees subway, no one hears. Wat you say, Julius, hah?“

Julius shook his head. „Packy wouldn't like it. It would be better to let Packy question him. Then we might find out more about Bennetz.“

„Oh,“ said Achilles. „I have not theenk of thees. You are vary smart, Julius.“

„Listen, you two,“ Tom said desperately. „What the devil are you talking about?“

Julius gave him a nasty grin. „We saw you, my very good friend. Only for you, our men would have finished off Bennetz. You must be in the pay of those Nazi

dogs. For a whole week we have planned the death of that rat. And then you stepped in and ruined it all. You must come with us till we find out more about you.“

„I'm not going anywhere with you!“ Tom exclaimed.

Julius frowned. „Did you hear that, Achilles? He won't come!“

„Bah!“ said Achilles.

„You see, my very good friend,“ Julius said in a reasonable manner, „Achilles and his family were in Athens when it was bombed. They all died there. He escaped. He would rather kill Nazis than eat or drink. He already get fifteen of them in the old country. You've read in the paper about these pro-Nazis escaping trial recently. We intend to bring justice to them anyway.“

A light broke on Tom. „You mean to say that you fellows have been planning all that?“

Julius shrugged. „I leave it to your imagination. Achilles wants to finish you off right here. So maybe you'll change your mind about coming along?“

The guns of the two men nudged into Tom's ribs.

The train rumbled into the station. They got to their feet.

„Well?“ said Julius.

Tom looked up at Achilles, and saw that the big fellow was just itching to pull the trigger of the gun in his pocket. He shrugged. „All right,“ he said. He got up, and they ranged themselves on either side of him. The train came to a stop and the three of them marched out on to the platform.

Just outside the door, Tom came to a stop. „Wait a minute,“ he said.

The two killers stopped, keeping close on either side of him. The door of the train started to slide shut.

Tom took a quick step back. His left fist flicked upward, and caught Achilles just behind the right ear in a beautiful rabbit punch.

Julius cursed, yanked the gun out of his pocket.

Tom Atherton shoved Achilles into Julius, then leaped backward through the quickly narrowing aperture of the sliding door. He got into the vestibule of the car. The door slid all the way shut behind him.

Julius jumped clear of the falling Achilles. He raised his gun and fired three times quickly through the glass at Tom.

Tom dropped to the floor and the shots crashed over his head to the accompaniment of smashing glass. But it all blended with the roar of the train. Several passengers from inside the car looked over toward the vestibule. Two or three of them came out to help Tom to his feet. They saw the broken glass, but did not know it had been caused by gun-fire.

„You want to sue the subway, mister,“ one of them said. „I'll give you my name in case you want me for a witness!“

„No, thanks,“ Tom said. „I guess I'm all right.“

He breathed a sigh of relief as the train pulled out of the station. That had been Fourteenth Street, and the next stop was Chambers Street, where he got out. As he ascended the stairs into the street, he glanced around quickly to see if the two gunmen had gotten there by taxi to intercept him, but there was no sign of them.

Tom hurried toward City Hall Square to his office on the twelfth floor of the Bridge Building.

Sally Blaine was already at her desk when he came in. Sally was five-feet-two of trim loveliness, with richly tinted auburn hair and merry blue eyes. She had

just gotten her own degree of Bachelor of Laws, and was clerking in Tom's office for her year of apprenticeship before being admitted to the Bar.

Tom leaned over the typewriter and kissed her. She made a wry face, wrinkling up her nose.

„Not in business hours, Tommy,“ she said.

He grinned down at her. „When we're married, I'll kiss you before breakfast every day. Now I have to be satisfied with kissing you before lunch!“

The telephone rang and she answered it. A look of puzzlement came into Sally's pretty face.

„It's for you, Tom, It's the Police Department. They say they found your stolen car. I didn't know it had been stolen—“

„It just happened, Sally!“ Tom said hastily, snatching the phone from her.

„This is Sergeant Griffin talking,“ the officer at the other end said to him. „We just picked up your car. It was used in a shooting. Want to come down and look at it?“

„I can't get down right away,“ Tom said. „I—I have to take care of a case in court this morning. I'll be over in the afternoon.“

When he hung up, Sally Blaine frowned at him. „Tom Atherton, what's this all about? When was your car stolen? And why did you lie to that policeman on the phone? You know perfectly well that you have no case in court this morning—“

„Yes, he has, lady!“ a heavy voice said from the doorway.

Sally's glance sprang to the door and she uttered a little gasp. Tom swiveled around.

The man who had just come in was the man in the panama hat whose life Tom had saved—Gustave Bennetz.

Chapter 2

BENNETZ was not alone. Four men filed into the office behind him—silent, tense men, heavy and sour of expression. Their eyes never left Tom Atherton. The last one in kicked the door shut and locked it.

Tom's face flushed a dull, brisk red. „What do you want?“ he demanded harshly.

For a moment, Bennetz did not answer. Then he nodded.

„Yes, Joseph,“ he said to one of the men behind him. „This is the one who saved me. It is good that you got his license number.“

Tom took a quick step forward. „What are you doing here—“

Bennetz raised a mollifying hand. There was a faint hint of a twisted smile on his heavy face. „I have only come to thank you, Mr. Atherton, for saving my life. These are my friends—“ he indicated the one he had addressed as Joseph—„Joseph Cleve“—then, nodding toward a second—„and Nikolas Tresca—“

„I'm not interested in you or your friends,“ Tom said firmly. „I've read all about you in the papers—“

„But, my dear Mr. Atherton! You must remember that I was acquitted—“

„Only because the witnesses had relatives in Europe!“ Tom broke in. „And now, please go.“

Bennetz frowned heavily. „Yon are not very judicious. I have come to repay you in some small way, for saving my life. Suppose we go into your private office. I would like to discuss some business with you. Surely you will not refuse me a few minutes of your time?“

Tom glanced sideways at Sally. She was white-faced and tense, puzzled by the whole thing. „What do you want to talk about?“ he asked.

Bennetz spread his hands. „It is not something we should discuss in the presence of your secretary.“

„You may talk in her presence. She’s my fiancée.“

The moment he said it, he regretted it. He saw a swift and cunning look come into Bennetz’s eyes.

„Ah!“ said Bennetz. „Your fiancée!“ He jerked his head at his men. „Cleve! Tresca! You know what to do!“

The two men moved forward swiftly, their guns coming into their hands. At the same time, the other two men stepped around the desk and seized Sally by either arm.

Tom felt the hot blood rush to his head. He went straight in at Cleve and Tresca, disregarding their guns. His left fist smashed through past Tresca’s gun hand and landed with a wicked thud squarely in the gunman’s face. That left of Tom’s was what had put him in the top running for the heavyweight championship. He used it now as he had never used it in the ring.

Tresca went backward, almost in a somersault. Tom sidestepped Cleve’s swishing gun barrel, which was coming down toward his head. He caught the blow on his shoulder, smashed out again with his left. He felt his fist land, but at the same time something came down on the back of his head like a trip hammer.

He fell forward, banging on to Cleve, clinching as he had often done in the ring to conserve his strength. He wasn’t out by a long shot, but at the moment he couldn’t coordinate his muscles effectively.

He heard Gus Bennetz say, „All right, don’t hit him again. Take the girl away—down the service elevator!“

Tom made a supreme effort to pull himself together. The back of his head felt as if it had been ripped open, but he managed to sway away from Cleve.

His blurred eyes made out the shapes of the remaining two thugs, one with a hand over Sally’s mouth, the other twisting her arms behind her. They were going out through the door.

Tom uttered a hoarse yell, lurched after them. Someone tripped him, and he fell flat on his face.

He pushed up on hands and knees, just as the door slammed shut. He thrust forward toward the door and found Bennetz standing in front of him with a small blackjack in his hand.

„Please do not make me hit you again,“ Bennetz said. „I would not like to do it to a man who has saved my life.“

„Damn you!“ Tom growled. „Get out of my way!“

He came in weaving, and Bennetz, with a regretful look, raised the blackjack to strike once more. Tom wove around to the right, blocking with his left, and took the weight of the blow on his left forearm. He started to bring up his right, but something hit him hard just over the muscles of his right biceps, numbing his arm. It was Cleve, who had smashed down with the butt of his reversed gun.

Bennetz clucked sympathetically, „Believe me,“ he said. „I regret to do this!“ He stepped in and hit Tom two short sharp blows on the side of the head with the blackjack.

Tom’s knees started to buckle, but he gritted his teeth and remained on his feet, all but out.

Cleve grunted. „Sit down!“ He put a hand on his chest and shoved him backward into a chair.

Bennetz came and stood in front of him, hefting the blackjack. „You are very foolish to act the way, Atherton. Your fiancée will not be hurt—if you will listen to reason.“

Tom closed his eyes. The pain was dancing around in the top of his skull.

„Where did those rats take Sally?“ he demanded hoarsely.

„Sally will be all right. Now listen to me. I am only trying to make you a proposition. But you make it very difficult. If you hadn’t saved my life, I would have lost patience with you by this time.“

„Forget that I saved your life!“ Tom groaned. „Just bring Sally back, and get to hell out of here!“

„No, no, Mr. Atherton. If you are foolish, I must set you straight. I am doing this for your own good. Here—“ he took a bulging wallet from an inside pocket and removed ten bills from it, all hundreds—„this is your retainer. You are a lawyer. You have done me a great favor. Therefore, I shall give you a case.“

„What case?“ Tom asked, trying to drive the fog out of his brain,

„The case is all ready and waiting for you. It comes up in General Sessions this morning. The people of the State of New York against Nathaniel Cleve. He is the brother of my friend here, Joseph Cleve.“ He leaned over Tom, and shoved the money in his breast pocket. „When you win the case, you get another thousand—and your girl comes back!“

„That case stinks!“ Tom exclaimed. „Nathaniel Cleve is accused of receiving explosives stolen from the State Armory. There are two witnesses, how can I beat it?“

„Please do not worry. You will go into court and appear. You will be surprised how easy it is to win some cases!“

They went down in the elevator together, and got into a car which was waiting at the curb. As they drove across town to the court, Cleve turned on the radio, caught a news broadcast:

„The police are still seeking the unknown killer who engaged in a bloody battle on Central Park West this morning...“

Tom shuddered. He—Tom Atherton—was the unknown killer whom the police were seeking! He glanced sideways, saw that Bennetz was watching him keenly.

„You must realize, Atherton, that your only chance is to play my game. Suppose you went to the police and told them that Gustave Bennetz has kidnaped your girl. Alone, that information might help you; but coupled with the fact that it was your car which was found...“

He let his voice trail off suggestively. „You see what I mean? It would look extremely suspicious. And think also what might be happening to your dear Sally while you were doing this talking to the police!“

„All right!“ Tom snapped. „You win. I’ll go in and stand up for this Nathaniel Cleve. But I won’t try to win the case. I’ll just appear as his counsel.“

„That is all I want you to do.“

„And if Sally doesn't show up safe and sound within one hour after the case is over, I'll track you down, Bennetz, wherever you are!“

When they reached the courthouse, Tom looked around nervously as they mounted the steps. He hated to have any lawyer friends of his see him in the company of these men. But there was nothing he could do about it.

They got upstairs to Part One of General Sessions just as the clerk was calling the case of Nathaniel Cleve.

The jury had already been chosen and the district attorney was rising to address them. Bennetz pointed to a ruddy-faced lawyer at the defense counsel table, who was sitting next to the defendant.

„That is Kurt Allsberg, the lawyer who has been handling the case.“ He led Tom Atherton down the aisle to the railing, and reached over and tapped Allsberg on the shoulder. „You may go,“ he said curtly. „You are finished. I have a new attorney.“

Allsberg became pale. „But what is the trouble, Gus? Have I done anything—“

„Go, I said! Inform the judge that we are substituting Thomas Atherton for you!“

The judge was watching them with a frown and District Attorney Harvey Grant was scowling.

Allsberg got up and addressed the bench,

„Your Honor, I—I have just been informed that another attorney is being substituted in my place. Mr. Thomas Atherton. I—I assure Your Honor that I knew nothing of this—“

District Attorney Harvey Grant came striding to the bench from where he had been standing at the jury box, „If the Court please, this is an outrage. We refuse to allow any further delay. The new attorney will naturally want time to familiarize himself with the case. It's a trick on the part of the defense to gain more time!“

Bennetz leaned over and whispered in Tom's ear, „Go in there and tell him you don't need any more time. You're ready to go on with the case right now.“

„But I don't know any of the facts,“ Tom protested. „How can I—“

„You do as I say!“ Bennetz insisted, giving him a little shove toward the railing, „If you want to see your Sally alive again...“

Tom went through the small gate in the railing and stepped up to the bench. „If Your Honor please, I will not require any time. I am ready to proceed at once.“

The judge leered over at the district attorney with a puzzled glint in his eyes.

„The defendant is entitled to a thorough defense. How can you hope to defend him properly without preparation?“

Tom shrugged, „If the defendant is satisfied—“

The judge looked over to where Nathaniel Cleve sat at the defense table. „Mr. Defendant, are you satisfied to have this attorney step into this case now at the eleventh hour, without preparation? You must realize that you stand a better chance with a better-prepared lawyer—“

Nathaniel Cleve looked a lot like his brother, Joseph. His eyes were hard, his face heavy, his lower lip pendulous.

„I am satisfied,“ he said stolidly,

The judge frowned as if he had a bitter taste in his mouth. He instructed the court stenographer to make a note of the substitution of attorneys.

Tom flushed. He ached to tell both Grant and the judge just why he was here now. But he glanced over his shoulder at Bennett's hard and ruthless face. He thought of Sally Blaine, helpless somewhere in the city. And he kept silent. He swallowed hard, and turned abruptly away, and went over to the defense table where Nathaniel Cleve was sitting.

District Attorney Grant began his speech to the jury. It was a short speech, but it was full of vitriol and fire. At the end he pointed his finger dramatically at Cleve.

„It is to rid the city of men such as this that you are here today, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. When the State produces the two witnesses who actually saw this defendant accept delivery of the stolen explosives, you will have no choice but to bring in a verdict of guilty!“

The judge looked over at Tom, and said, „If counsel for the defense does not wish to address the jury, we will proceed.“ Tom shook his head, and the judge motioned to Grant, who arose again.

„My two witnesses should be here now,“ he said. He turned dramatically and called out, „Miss Irene Field!“

There was utter silence in the courtroom. No one answered.

Grant frowned. „Mr. John Turner!“ he called.

Again there was no answer.

Tom Atherton, watching Grant's face, saw it turn red with anger. Tom himself began to feel a little uneasy. Somehow he seized that the courtroom was suddenly imbued with a strange sort of electric tension.

Suddenly the door at the rear of the courtroom opened.

Grant's face brightened. „Ah!“ he said to the jury, „These must be my witnesses. We have had them under guard at a hotel all night.“

Every eye turned toward the door. But only one man came in. It was one of the young assistant district attorneys. He seemed to be laboring under a tremendous strain of excitement and consternation. He came through the railing and whispered to District Attorney Grant.

Grant's bony frame stiffened as he heard the assistant's report. He turned and looked at Tom Atherton with a terrible concentrated glare of hatred.

Tom felt himself grow cold all over.

Grant swung around and addressed the judge. „Your Honor, I have just been informed of a terrible tragedy. A time bomb exploded a few minutes ago on the fourteenth floor of the hotel where our two witnesses were kept under guard. They were both killed, together with two bailiffs!“

A great gasp went up from everybody in the courtroom,

The judge turned an ominous eye toward Tom. „Mr. Atherton,“ he rumbled, „as attorney for the defendant, what do you know about this?“

Tom arose shakily. „I assure Your Honor that I know nothing at all about it.“

Grant's lips twisted sardonically. „No wonder you were so willing to come in and take a case without preparing it. You knew there would be no witnesses!“

„You have no right to say that!“ Tom Atherton gasped. He pushed up from the table and started over toward Grant, but a bailiff seized him by the arm. He saw the judge watching him expectantly, and he suddenly understood that His Honor was just waiting for some pretext to hold him for contempt of court.

His shoulders sagged. There was no way he could prove his innocence, without endangering the life of Sally Blaine. After hearing what had happened to those two witnesses he had no illusions about Sally's safety.

As if in a dream he heard the district attorney saying, „In view of the lack of evidence... compelled to agree to nolle prosequere...“

And then he heard the judge saying, „As for you, Mr. Atherton, please come to my chambers at once...“

He raised his head and saw that the courtroom had emptied out. Gus Bennett was no longer there. Neither was Nathaniel Cleve. But a man came up to Tom and whispered, „Mr. Bennett says to be at the Midnight Club tonight. You'll find your girl there—if you don't talk to the police!“

The man turned and hurried away. Tom was about to follow him when a bailiff took hold of his arm.

„The judge ordered me to escort you to his chambers,“ the bailiff said.

Tom nodded dumbly and went with him.

Chapter 3

HARVEY GRANT was already in the judge's room, together with another man whom Tom recognized as Inspector Lansing, Chief of Homicide.

„Mr. Atherton,“ said Judge Simmons, who was seated at his desk, „I asked you to come here because the developments in court just now have been highly suspicious so far as you are concerned. Inspector Lansing wishes to ask you some questions.“

Lansing was standing near the Window, with his uncompromising stare fixed implacably upon Tom.

„Mr. Atherton,“ he rambled, „two state witnesses were bombed this morning. With them, two bailiffs were killed. As an attorney, you must surely realize your position. It's a murder case now. I want you to tell us everything you know.“

„I'm sorry,“ Tom said wearily. „There's nothing I can tell you at this moment.“

Lansing glanced sideways at Harvey Grant, who stepped forward eagerly. „You mean—it might incriminate you? Do you refuse to answer on the ground that it may incriminate you?“

„No,“ said Tom. „I have done nothing criminal.“

„Then you must answer!“ Grant exclaimed triumphantly.

„I can't tell you anything now,“ Tom said carefully. „There is a very important reason why I can't. If you'll give me two or three hours, I hope to be free to answer any of your questions.“

„Two or three hours!“ said Grant. „Are you thinking of leaving town?“

„What about your car?“ Inspector Lansing thundered at him from the other side. „It was used in the shooting this morning. From the descriptions given by bystanders, you were the gunman. You reported your car stolen to throw us off the track!“

„That's true,“ Tom admitted wearily. „But I wasn't any gunman. I just happened to be passing at the moment—“

He stopped, seeing that both Lansing and Grant were looking at him with disgust.

„Isn't it kind of late to spring a story like that?“ Grant demanded.

„I tell you it's true. And the girl I'm going to marry is a prisoner of Gus Bennett. He forced me to appear for Cleve—“

„Stow it!“ Lansing barked. „Your story gets worse and worse. Now look here“—he seized Tom by the lapels of his coat and went on, blusteringly—„you'll tell us what you know—“

Tom shook him off angrily, and swung toward Judge Simmons.

„Your Honor,“ he pleaded, „will you let me explain—“

And he stopped right there, with a queer, sinking sensation in his stomach. He saw that the eyes of all three men were on something that had been pushed up out of his breast pocket in the short tussle with Lansing. Those ten one-hundred dollar bills were just on the verge of falling out of his pocket. Their denomination was clearly visible.

Tom caught them just as they were about to drop and stuffed them back in his pocket. But the damage was done. He saw the revulsion in the judge's eyes, and dimly to his ears came Grant's voice:

„So Bennettz forced you to appear for Cleve—with a wad of hundred-dollar bills!“

The district attorney swung toward Judge Simmons. „Your Honor, I submit that there is enough evidence to hold this man as a material witness in connection with the murder of the witnesses in the Cleve case!“

Judge Simmons nodded gravely. „I so order!“

Inspector Lansing put a hand on his arm.

„Thomas Atherton, you are under arrest. In accordance with the law, I now warn you that anything further you say may be used against you!“

Suddenly a desperate haze of fury swept over Tom Atherton. He sent his body into a powerful lunge that tore him free of the inspector's grip.

„Hey!“ yelled Lansing and dove for his gun.

TOM swung with his left. The smack of his fist connecting with the inspector's chin was like the pop of a soda bottle. Lansing went backward, out on his feet, and the gun dropped from his nerveless fingers.

Tom swung to the door, ripped it open, and sped out into the corridor.

Behind him he heard a shout and turned in time to see Harvey Grant picking up the gun which Lansing had dropped. Grant dropped to one knee and rested the revolver carefully on his elbow, taking aim at Tom.

Tom kept on running down the corridor toward the exit. A shot boomed out, resounding from the raftered ceiling of the court house, and the bullet whined so close to Tom's ear that he thought for a moment he was hit. The thunderous echoes of the shot cascaded back from every wall as a uniformed guard burst out of one of the courtrooms and, seeing Tom running, attempted to intercept him.

Tom straight-armed the guard, sent him crashing to one side. He threw another hasty glance behind him and saw Grant, in the doorway of the judge's room, taking careful aim for a second shot. He threw himself flat to the floor, head first, just as Grant fired.

Tom landed on his face and hands, and slid for perhaps five feet, carried along by his momentum. Grant's gun thundered. The slug whined over Tom's head, smashing the glass in the front door.

As Tom slid along the floor he saw that there was a right turn in the corridor a few feet ahead. When he landed, he rolled over swiftly and ducked around the bend just as Grant pulled the trigger for the third time.

Tom stumbled to his feet and ran blindly along the side hall in which he found himself. There was a doorway at his left and he pushed through it so fast that he could not stop when he saw it opened on a flight of stairs. He went careening down the steps head over heels. Somehow, by dint of the good fortune which watches over drunks and fools, he did not sustain any broken bones. He felt bruised and limp, but he forced himself to his feet, and staggered out into an alley.

Everywhere he heard the shouts of men, as they took up the alarm; from behind him, inside the building; from the street in front of the court house, and from the upper floors of the building.

Suddenly he knew the poignant terror of a hunted man. He turned and stumbled blindly down toward the rear of the alley. He saw another door in the side of the court house trailing, and pushed through it, for he knew that he would surely be caught in the alley. He knew the layout of the court fairly well, and he recognized the portion which he had entered as the corridor to the detention pen. There would be another door down this hall, opening into the back street.

He fairly ran down the corridor to the back door. He slipped out once more into daylight, and suddenly found himself in a crowd of milling men, some in uniform. They had converged from the street, attracted by the shouts. One of them was an under-sheriff, who knew Tom.

He said, „What’s happening, Mr. Atherton? I was just coming in when I heard the shots—“

„It’s an escaped killer!“ Tom shouted, „Everybody better take cover. He’s armed!“

The crowd dispersed quickly, and Tom sprinted across the street, turned a corner, and hailed a passing cab. He climbed in breathlessly.

„Take me to the Midnight Club!“ he gasped.

The Midnight Club was in the upper Eighties, near Third Avenue. Tom walked past it, looking it over. It was too much to expect, of course, that this was where they had taken Sally. The club was not open for business, anyway, for it was still early in the day. However, the front door was ajar, and he could see that there were several waiters and busboys inside, cleaning up and preparing for the day’s business.

Tom walked past it once, and stopped near the corner, lighting a cigarette. There was a cab rank at the corner, and the cabby had his radio going. From where he stood, Tom heard the news announcer:

„...All police and law-enforcing agencies are combing the city for Atherton. Any citizen seeing the fugitive is requested to report immediately by phone to police headquarters. When last seen he was wearing a brown suit, brown-and-red tie, and a gray felt hat. He is about six feet tall, blue eyes and fair hair, very well built, as he was formerly a prizefighter...“

Tom grunted, and threw his cigarette away. He thought he saw the cabby glancing over at him, but he couldn’t be sure. He moved away nonchalantly from the corner, and hurried into the open doorway of the Midnight Club.

Inside, he stood for a moment, accustoming his eyes to the blurred light. The waiters and busboys were busy and paid him no attention. He saw a door at the left marked „Manager’s Office,“ and he went over and pushed it open and stepped inside.

Tom came and stood in front of the desk.

„Where’s Gus Bennetz?“ he demanded.

The manager frowned up at him, „Bennetz? He’ll be here tonight—“

„Can’t wait till tonight,“ said Tom. „Got to see him right away. Where can I find him?“

The fellow shrugged. „Who are you?“

Tom grinned. He saw a letter opener on the desk. He picked it up by the handle, and walked around the desk. The manager started to get up, but Tom pushed him back in the chair. He touched the point of the letter opener to the fellow’s red neck:

„In case you don’t know it,“ he said, „I’m Tom Atherton. If you’ve listened to your radio, you’ll know all about me. I’m wanted for so many damned things I don’t mind being wanted for killing you, too. Is that clear?“

„W-what—what do you want?“ the fellow stammered, squirming away from the cold point of the street.

„I want to get in touch with Gus Bennetz.“

„Well, wait, I’ll phone him.“

„Go ahead. But don’t try any tricks.“

The manager very carefully picked up a telephone index from the desk, and flipped it over to the N’s. He ran his finger down till he hit a number alongside a name. The name was „Nine Star Boxing Club.“ The number was Sutter 21674.

„That,“ said Tom Atherton, „is all I wanted to know!“ He threw away the letter opener, grasped the fellow’s coat by the lapels, and lifted him out of the chair with his left hand. At the same time, he brought his right around in a terrific blow to the fellow’s chin. The man’s head snapped back, and when Tom let go of the lapels, the fellow just subsided into the chair, slumped down, and did not move.

Tom snatched up the phone, called the District Attorney’s office. In a moment he had Harvey Grant. „Grant,“ he said, „this is Atherton.“

He heard a gasp at the other end, and then there was a moment’s silence.

„Grant! Are you there? I said this is Atherton!“

A burly individual was sitting at a desk, making entries in a ledger. „He looked up and heard you,“ came Grant’s voice, very slowly and mildly. „I’m glad you phoned. There are a lot of things I want to talk over with you.“ He was talking in a slow, easy drawl, and Tom’s lips tightened as he realized that the District Attorney was having the call traced.

„Listen to me, Grant. I have information for you that will help you get Bennetz and his whole filthy crowd.“

„So you’re ready to talk!“ the District Attorney said. „Well, I’m glad to hear that, Atherton. Suppose we arrange a meeting.“

„Look here, Grant. I just got a line on a place that may hold dynamite. Now if I give you the location, will you promise not to stage a raid?“

„Well, that’s a fairly reasonable request,“ Grant said, still in that infuriatingly slow drawl. „Just why don’t you want us to stage a raid?“

„Because Bennetz is holding my girl. Now if Sally is being held at this address your raid might save her. But if those rats are holding her somewhere else, and the raid doesn’t turn anything up then I’m sure they’ll kill her.“

„Now wait, Atherton,“ said the District Attorney. „Do you still think you can make me believe that fish story about your girl having been kidnaped by Bennetz? Why don’t you come in and give yourself up—“

Tom was standing near the window with the telephone, and it was only by chance that he glanced out and saw the police car which pulled up silently across the street. They had traced the call while Grant had held him in conversation.

„Damn you Grant!“ Tom exclaimed into the phone. He hung up, and dashed out into the corridor. He made for the rear, and passed through the kitchen door. Just as the door swung to, he caught a glimpse of the policemen coming in the front. He did not wait to see more, but made tracks out the back way.

Chapter 4

HE walked the streets for ten minutes, ducking every time he saw a policeman, trying to think as hard as he could. He knew where to find Gus Bennetz now.

The Nine Star Boxing Club was not an unfamiliar name to him. He had boxed there two or three times, in the old days. But the club had long been abandoned. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to believe that Bennetz might be using it as a hideaway. It would be a good place to conceal a captive. So Tom was almost sure Sally was being held there. But the knowledge did him little good.

He didn't kid himself that he could go in there with his bare fists, and take Bennetz's experienced gunners. For himself he didn't care. But Sally's life might be forfeit. No, he must have help. An appeal to the law was closed to him. Grant wouldn't listen.

He racked his brains for some inspiration. And suddenly, he snapped his fingers. He flagged a cab and got in.

„Take us over to the Greek quarter!“ he ordered.

„Which one do you mean?“ the driver asked. „Downtown? Or uptown?“

For a moment Tom was stuck. Then he shrugged. „Uptown,“ he said.

Five minutes later he left the cab in the uptown Greek section, and strolled down the street. He saw a restaurant with Greek letters on the window, and he went in. At the desk he said, „Where will I find Packy?“

There was a girl cashier at the counter, but she looked blank. She called over the manager, then two waiters came over too, and they all debated the question of which Packy Tom wanted. Finally the manager shrugged and said, „Iss many Packys. W'ich one you wanting?“

„I want the one who has a friend named Achilles, and another named Julius—“

„Aha!“ exclaimed the manager. He took Tom by the arm, led him to the door, and pointed down the street. „You going over d'ere—number t'irtyt'ree, D'ere you finding Packy!“

Tom thanked him and walked down the street. Number thirty-three was a three-story brick building, with a store occupying the entire street level. The plate-glass window of the store was painted an opaque green, so that passersby couldn't look inside. There was white lettering on the green background. The top line was in Greek, which Tom couldn't read. The second line said:

Antoninos Pakidopulos, Pres.

There was a hard and determined glint in Tom's eyes as he stepped up to the store and pushed the door open.

Inside there were some fifteen or twenty tables, covered with red-and-white checkered tablecloths. Several of the tables were occupied by men who were playing checkers, chess, or casino. The room was filled with smoke and the stale odor of tobacco. At one side there was a bar and a sandwich counter.

The noise of conversation ceased as Tom closed the door behind him. Every eye in the room was turned on him. He saw a lot of hands slip down into pockets, or up toward shoulder bulges.

From one table in a corner, two men arose. Tom tautened, watching them come toward him. They were Achilles and Julius—the two whom he had eluded in the subway.

Julius was grinning like a cat who has cornered a mouse, but Achilles' thick features assumed a murderous scowl. They came up close to Tom.

„How do you do, my very good friend!“ said Julius. „That was a dirty trick you played on us in the subway.“

„Hah!“ said Achilles. „Thees ees those guy w'ich smack me be-ind thee ear. I theenk I gonna break hees nack!“

„My very good friend,“ Julius said commiseratingly, „you should not have hit Achilles. Achilles does not like to be hit.“

„I want to see Packy,“ said Tom.

Julius snickered. „Haw!“ He nudged Achilles in the ribs. „Did you hear that? He wants to see Packy!“

„Sure,“ growled Achilles. „Sure he see Packy. But he not be seeing so good. Because w'y? Because I gonna geev heem dose works first!“

He spread out both his huge, ham-like arms to encircle Tom's waist. Tom could see the muscles bulging under the Greek's coat, and he knew that once he was caught in that gorilla grip he'd have little chance of keeping his ribs intact. He tried to step back, but the door was behind him.

A look of supreme happiness came upon Achilles' face as he smothered Tom with his huge bulk. His arms started to wrap themselves around his intended victim's body.

Tom kept his elbows close at his sides, and pistoned his fists in-and-out, in-and-out, like the twin cylinders of an engine. His hard, bunched fists landed four times each, square in the midsection of the big man, burying themselves almost to the wrist in his stomach.

Achilles was forced back by the very power of those blows, and he expelled a great gust of onion-and-garlic breath. He bellowed with rage, and charged in again. This time he wasn't going for a bear hug. He had his two hands held high in the wrestler's stance, for a headlock.

Tom caught a swift glimpse of the rest of the men in the room, all watching with professional interest. They were all sure, apparently, that their champion would soon crack a majority of Tom's bones.

Tom was no wrestler. He knew he couldn't compete for holds with this huge and powerful gorilla of a man. He sidestepped away from the door, flicked out his left to make the Greek keep his distance, and danced away. His flicking left cut his antagonist's lip open, and Achilles' voice thundered through the room in a terrifying murderous roar. He came lumbering forward in a half crouch.

Tom slid over to one side, fainted with his left and then crashed a right across to Achilles' head. It caught him on the side of the temple with a terrible squashing sound, but the Greek only shook his head to clear it, and kept coming in.

Julius was watching intently, with his head cocked on one side, like a referee.

„T'chk, t'chk,“ he said. "Your chances, my good friend, are very slim!"

Tom was too busy to answer, because the Greek was into him now, clawing at his legs, his neck, his torso, in a wild and vengeful effort to get a punishing hold. Tom kept dancing away and flicking his left, but all he could do was make the giant slow up a bit. He couldn't stop him. He landed two more blows square on the button, but he didn't even get a flicker out of Achilles.

The men all over the room were now buzzing excitedly. They were making wagers on the outcome. The odds on Achilles were eight to one.

A fine sweat was beginning to cover Tom's forehead. Never before in his life had he given ground in the ring, and this was a new experience for him. His most powerful blows were worse than useless. Achilles had an iron jaw.

Tom backed away into a table, and before he could move, the Greek was upon him. He caught Tom's left wrist in both of his hairy hands, and whirled around with the evident intention of sending his victim hurtling over his shoulder.

But even as he started to twist around, Tom smashed a right home just over the heart. Achilles grunted again, and his grip relaxed the faintest bit.

Tom yanked his wrist out of the grip, and with a sudden gleam of understanding he came in at Achilles, disregarding all danger of getting caught in another grip.

He had discovered the Greek's weak spot!

He came in, wide open, smashing rights and lefts to the big man's heart. And suddenly he found he was moving forward, and Achilles was retreating.

He stopped short, straightened the Greek up with a left jab over the eye, and then tried once more for the knockout.

His right smashed in so fast that hardly a man in the room saw the blow. But they all heard the thwack.

The Greek was done. Those body blows had softened him for the kill. When Tom's fist landed on his jaw, he just let his arms drop, and he slowly fell forward on his face. He lay still, with his arms out flung.

An excited jabber of voices arose in the room as jubilant takers of the eight-to-one odds rushed to collect.

TOM felt of his hand to see if any bones were broken. Then he wiped sweat from his face. He looked at Julius, who was clucking with unbelief.

„T'chk, t'chk. Nobody has ever done that to Achilles before. It doesn't seem possible!“

„Well,“ Tom asked, „do I get to see Packy now? Or do I have to fight someone else?“

Julius grinned. „Come, my very good friend!“

He led the way up two flights of musty stairs, and stopped before a door at the rear. He knocked at the door, and then went inside, motioning for Tom to follow him. As soon as they were inside, he took a gun from his pocket and covered Tom.

„Just to be on the safe side,“ he grinned. Then he waved toward the stocky man with the close-cropped black hair sitting at a small desk.

„Packy, what do you think? This is the man we invited over this morning, but he wouldn't come. Imagine—he walked in just now of his own free will!“

Packy raised his eyebrows. „What did you come here for?“ he demanded.

Tom said, „I want to make a deal with you.“

Packy's eyes hardened. „I make no deals with the tools of the Nazis!“

„Listen to me!“ Tom said, suddenly earnest. „I'm no tool of Bennetz. I never talked with him before this morning. It was just by accident that I horned in on your men. It was a cold-blooded attempt at murder, and anyone would have done what I did!“

„Murder?“ Packy repeated. There was abruptly a terrible opaque look in his black eyes. „Murder? Do you know what the Nazis do to our people in Greece? Is that not murder?“

„But you have no right to commit murder here, because of what those beasts do over there. Besides, Bennetz is an American citizen—“

„Sure, sure he is. And that is what protects him from the law.“ Packy's fist crashed down on the desk. „But not from us!“ He controlled himself with an effort.

„Go on,“ he said,

„After I saved Bennetz's life,“ Tom hurried on, „he came down to my office, and kidnaped my fiancée—Sally Blaine. And I had to go into court and represent Nathaniel Cleve, to save her life. Now Bennetz is holding Sally—“

„Where?“ Packy was suddenly interested.

Tom shook his head. „Not so fast, Packy. I've come to you, because I can't go near the police. District Attorney Grant has practically forced me to make an alliance with you. But I'm not going to let you go after Bennetz with guns.“

„Why not?“ Packy demanded. „If Bennetz has your girl, don't you want to see him killed? What kind of blood have you in your veins?“

„This has got to be done my way or not at all,“ Tom said firmly. „I want to get Sally out of Bennetz's hands. I need your help. All right. In exchange for your help, I'll undertake that Bennetz will stand trial on enough charges to send him to the electric chair. But I won't be a party to murder.“

„What do you want us to do?“ Packy asked suspiciously.

„I'll need some supplies, and about twenty of your men.“

„What kind of supplies?“

„White helmets, like the air-raid wardens wear—“

„Hah!“ said Packy. „You don't have to worry about that. We're all air-raid wardens. I run this whole sector!“

Tom grinned happily. „Can you get some stretchers, some stirrup pumps, and some of those smoke bombs that the wardens use in their practice drills?“

„Sure,“ said Packy. „I can get you all that. But listen, you can't fight Bennetz with smoke bombs and stirrup pumps—“

„They're better than guns sometimes,“ Tom told him.

Packy shook his head. „It sounds crazy to me.“ He looked at Julius. „What about it?“

Julius grinned. „You ought to let him try it, Packy. The way he laid Achilles out, I'm all in his favor!“

Suddenly Packy the Greek smiled. He pushed back his chair and got up. He came around and thrust out his hand to Tom. „Okay, Atherton. We'll give you a chance!“

Chapter 5

TWO hours and twenty minutes later, Tom Atherton got out of a car in front of a building on Old Broadway, close to the river. He presented a strange figure as he stood there, surveying the building. An air-raid warden's armband adorned his sleeve. A white helmet covered his head. And a gas mask hid his entire face.

The building before which he stood was ramshackle and dilapidated, with the paint almost entirely gone. The windows were all boarded up, and there was a sign nailed across one of the lower windows which read:

FOR SALE OR RENT
Inquire Of Your Own Broker

The building was only two stories high. On the strip of front wall between the first and second floor windows there was what remained of an old wooden sign which had once sported gilt letters.

The gilt was all gone, but the imprint of the lettering was still legible:

NINE-STAR BOXING CLUB

Five years ago, Tom Atherton had boxed for a living on Friday nights in this very building. Now it was abandoned apparently. But Tom knew otherwise.

He examined the building for a moment, then he made a signal with his hand. Immediately three more cars sped up from the corner and came to a stop across the street. Men in air-raid wardens' uniforms piled out, some carrying stretchers, others carrying picks and shovels, all wearing helmets and gas masks.

Achilles and Julius were in the first of those cars, and Tom recognized Achilles by his build. The giant came over and spoke to Tom through his gas mask.

„You know,“ he said, „I t'ink you is one guy w'ich is a good fighter, You an' me is friends, no?“

„Yes,“ said Tom.

The air-raid wardens gathered around, and Tom started issuing orders in a loud voice. He got a piece of chalk and marked out a square section of sidewalk about ten feet by ten, and motioned to them to get to work. They fell to with a will, using the pickaxes.

There was a cop down near the ferry building, and he strolled over. „Air-raid drill?“ he asked.

Tom nodded. „We're working on an incident. A bomb is supposed to have fallen on this building. Ten people are trapped inside. We're supposed to see how fast we can dig 'em out.“

The cop hung around for a few minutes, then left. Tom went on supervising the work. All the time, he kept an eye on the Nine Star building. Twice he caught the movement of one of the boards in an upper window. Somebody was watching from inside.

Soon the hole was deep enough for a man to climb down into. One of the men signaled to Tom and he got down and scrambled into it. He saw that they had opened up the exposed section of the building wall, making a hole through which a man could climb into the cellar.

Tom switched on a flashlight and sent its ray probing into the interior. It illuminated the basement with which he was familiar. The fighters' dressing rooms had been located down here, and many a time Tom had waited in one of those cubicles for the signal to go up into the ring.

Julius climbed down alongside him carrying a sack of smoke bombs, „You all ready?“ he asked, „Yes,“ said Tom. „I'm going in.“

„Here's a gun,“ said Julius, offering him an automatic.

Tom shook his head. „I never shot one of those things in my life. I wouldn't trust myself to shoot straight with it.“

„Well, put it in your pocket, anyway. You never can tell when you'll need it. See, this is the safety. You must push it down with your thumb to shoot.“

„Thanks,“ said Tom. He put the gun in his pocket. „Stay here with your watch. Julius,“ he ordered. „Remember, give me fifteen minutes before you start.“

„Good luck,“ said Julius.

Tom bent down and climbed through the hole in the wall into the basement.

He flicked the flashlight only once, to get his bearings, and then proceeded in the dark. He mounted the staircase leading to the main floor, and gently inched open the door at the top of the stairs.

There were lights there. He could see that the seats had been removed from the auditorium floor, leaving a cleared space. In that space there was now a row of cots and several tables and chairs.

Almost a dozen men were in there. They got their light from a low candle-power storage battery lamp on the floor.

An electric cooker had been set up on the platform where the ring had formerly been, and one of the men was grilling a steak.

The men were talking in low voices watching one of their number who was peering through a crack in the boarded front window. The man turned around. Tom got a glimpse of a bandage across his nose. It was Tresca.

„Those damned wardens are still out there!“ Tresca growled.

„Well,“ said one of the others, „we'll have to go out the back way and use the boat. We can't stay cooped up in here all night.“

„You can't use the boat yet,“ Tresca told him, „Gus has a job for it.“

Another of the men snickered. „Looks like that girl will get a bath tonight. Too bad she has to die. She's a good looker.“

Tom felt the hot blood rushing in his veins. He inched his way along the edge of the floor where the light did not reach, heading toward a door at the far side which he knew led to the upper story. There the executive offices of the club had been located. The process of getting across noiselessly was slow and laborious. Once he had to stop and drop flat on the floor in the shadows, for a man came in from the rear, where there was an exit to the old rotting dock.

This man did not come all the way into the room. He merely called out, „Hey, Tresca! Tell Gus the boat’s ready.“

„Okay,“ said Tresca, and left the crack in the window. He crossed over to the door for which Tom was aiming, and disappeared through it.

Tom took chances now. He crawled on all fours, moving as fast as he could. He reached the door without attracting any attention and slipped through it. He mounted the stairs quickly, reached the top landing without making a sound.

Light streamed out on the landing through an open door at the head of the stairs. Tom edged along the wall, keeping out of the path of the stream of light, and peered inside.

His questing anxious eyes passed over the five men in that room, and focused on what at first appeared to be a bundle of old clothes on the floor. The bundle was moving violently and Tom drew in his breath sharply.

It was Sally. She was tied hand and foot and there was tape across her mouth.

Tom took out the automatic. Now he was glad he had taken it from Julius.

The five men in the room were talking in subdued voices, but their words carried clearly out to the landing.

Tom knew four of them. There was one, sitting in a corner and putting a machine gun together, whom he did not know. Bennetz was pacing up and down, nervously smoking a cigar. Tresca, who had just come up, was bending over Sally. Joseph Cleve was lighting a cigarette.

But it was the sight of the fifth man that caused Tom’s eyes to narrow. That fifth man was Kurt Allsberg—the lawyer whom Bennetz had fired in the middle of the Cleve trial in order to put Tom Atherton into the case!

It was Allsberg who was talking at the moment. He was rubbing his chin, smiling with satisfaction.

„So far everything has gone off like clockwork. It was smart of you, Gus, to pick that Atherton fool to hold the bag. It would have been bad for me to be on the case when they got word that those witnesses were killed.“

Gus Bennetz grinned. „And he made it worse for himself by escaping. Now they’ll surely shoot him on sight!“

„Suppose,“ Allsberg said, „that they don’t shoot him? If they catch him alive, he can talk and make trouble for you.“

Bennetz shook his head, grinning. He nodded toward the skinny little man who was working on the machine gun in the corner. „If Atherton isn’t caught, he’s sure to try and get in touch with me. I’ll make a date with him and Buzzza will keep it, with the machine gun.“

„So!“ said Allsberg. „Not bad. That will close up every hole. All right. I think I’ll be going. Damn those wardens. I’ll have to leave on the boat. You can take the girl, too. Land me further down, and then take her out in the river.“

„The boat’s ready,“ said Tresca.

„Okay,“ Bennetz ordered. „You and Cleve carry her down—“

Tom had been waiting, watch in one hand, gun in the other. It was exactly fifteen minutes since he had left Julius.

He backed away from the door, watching the interior of the room and at the same time sniffing the air. His eyes brightened as he caught the fumes of smoke, as yet very light. But the men downstairs had already smelled the smoke, for it was reaching them first, Julius had set off six smoke bombs in the cellar, and the fumes were working slowly upward.

There was a sudden excited jabber of voices from the main floor. Someone yelled, „Fire!“

Someone else down there took up the shout, and at once there was the sound of rushing, panicky feet. The men downstairs were running toward the rear of the building, to escape out on the dock. They all knew what an old fire-trap the building was, and they didn't want to be burned alive.

Tresca and Cleve had just begun to lift Sally Blaine between them when the shout of fire was raised.

Tresca said, „Fire!“ and let go of Sally. She dropped to the floor with a thump.

Bennetz swore viciously. The smoke was coming up faster now, and they could all smell it.

„The whole building is going!“ he yelled. „We have to get out of here. Leave the girl. Let her burn!“

He led the rush to the door, and Tom, with a grim hard smile on his lips, stepped in to meet him.

Bennetz almost collided with him, but he had no chance to jump backward, because Tom hit him hard on the temple with the barrel of the automatic.

Bennetz sagged in the doorway, and the others in the room scrambled around him in their mad anxiety to get out. Tresca was first. He pulled up short at sight of the automatic in Tom's hand.

Tresca streaked for his shoulder holster. Tom stepped in and smashed a left square into his broken nose. Tresca screamed with pain, and went backward into Cleve and Allsberg, who were pushing wildly out.

Tom came in after them like a whirlwind, scattering them out of the doorway. He burst through and met the little man, Buzza, who came bounding out of the chair with the still unassembled machine gun in his hands. Tom hit Buzza a backhanded blow that sent him slamming into the wall. Then he jumped to where Sally lay, and turned around to face the gunmen.

Tresca was down on the floor, moaning with pain, but Cleve was just dragging a gun from his holster. Tom set his jaw, snicked the safety catch off the automatic as Julius had shown him, and pulled the trigger.

The gun roared in the room, and Tom was jarred backward by the recoil. His foot moved back, and he tripped over Sally's limp form.

His own shot had missed Cleve by almost a foot, but had buried itself in the stomach of Kurt Allsberg. Cleve fired, the thunder of the shot drowning Allsberg's scream.

The thing that saved Tom was the fact that he tripped. It carried him out of line of Cleve's shot, and the slug slammed through the boarded window behind him.

The room was full of smoke now and Cleve didn't shoot again. He turned with a gasp of panic and ran blindly out into the hall, hoping to escape before the building was engulfed by fire.

Tom scrambled to his feet and peered around the room. Buzza was getting up and pawing at his back pocket for a gun.

Tom's lips tightened. He stepped in, brought his fist up in a short arc to Buzza's chin, and the skinny, murderous little machine-gunner went down.

Tom swung away from him and knelt beside Sally. He ripped the tape off her lips and cut the cords that were tied around her body.

„Tom,“ she said, „I think you're wonderful!“

He grinned and kissed her, and turned around to face a small army of police who were crowding into the room.

„Boys,“ he said, „I‘m Tom Atherton. But I don‘t think you‘ll be wanting me any more. There‘s the whole Bennetz crowd, including the brains of the outfit—Kurt Allsberg. These are the boys that blew up the two witnesses and the bailiffs this morning. And I think you‘ll find that machine gun on the floor one of the things stolen from the armories.“

He held Sally close in his arms and smiled down into her eyes, entirely disregarding the bewildered stares of the police.

„Anyway,“ he told her, „I got a thousand dollar retainer out of this. A thousand dollars will buy us a lot of furniture, Sally. We could get married now instead of in May.“

„And,“ she added, „you can start kissing me before breakfast from now on!“

