

Crime Gets A Head

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by Milton T. Lamb

CHAPTER I

Percival Smith, my boss, was reading a book written by some guy named Freud when the phone rang. He didn't look up from the book. He said, with a nod, "Answer it, Willie."

I was glad to, glad of the chance to do something. Percival Smith has long periods of silence when's he not very good company. I'd been twiddling my thumbs and trying to doze for the last hour.

I got out of my chair, walked to his desk, and picked the phone up. I said, "Yeah?" A torchy voice asked, "The Smith Agency?"

"None other," I said, thinking that the female who owned the voice must be plenty easy on the eyes.

"Is Mr. Smith in?"

The boss kept reading. I nudged him with my elbow and pointed to the phone. He frowned at me, shook his head, and looked back at his book.

I said, "I'm sorry, but he's not here. Can I help you? This is Aberstein. I'm his assistant."

"I'm Alicia Droyster," the voice said. "I..."

I covered the mouthpiece with my hand. "The Droyster dame, boss!"

He sat up at that, closed his book with a pop. He reached out a hand which the little blonde dish at Central Barber Shop manicures twice every week.

The Droyster dame was saying something about a calling card and a Great Dane dog, when I broke in. "Just a minute. The boss has just blew in."

I handed him the phone, stepped back to watch him. He began asking Alicia Droyster a lot of questions. His eyes sort of got warm-looking and I could see his hand get tight on the phone. Well, I been with him long enough to know the signs. I wondered what in hell it would be this time.

Smith can get into more messes in five minutes than you or me could in ten years. He began to smile and it made my stomach nearly do a flip over. I wished he would tell the Droyster dame good-bye and hang up. But I knew from the way he was grinning that he wouldn't do that. Smith is a private shamus because he wants to be. And that kind of guy always hunts trouble.

I moved around the desk and sat down. I was already betting myself three to one that Smith would find what he was hunting—if Alicia Droyster hired him.

Two days ago, Mark Droyster, Alicia's loving hubby, had gone home late in the afternoon, gone in his bedroom, and rigged up a contraption with coat hangers and a sawed-off shotgun. I thought it was a very messy way for a guy to kill himself. When they found Droyster there hadn't been anything left of his head.

The bulls had marked it up as suicide without thinking about it much, and Droyster had been put six feet under late yesterday. It had been a very private funeral. Alicia Droyster, a sawbones named Lawrence Jordan, the preacher and pallbearers were all the people the Droyster dame would let come into the cemetery.

As usual, the boys on the news sheets made a big splash with it. This Mark Droyster had been as tough as a bulldog. He'd started as a kid selling papers, muscled his way up in a rough and ready style until he was a big shot. But when he cashed in his chips, the newshounds hinted that he was busted. It was odds around town that losing his dough had put him in such a funk that he killed himself.

But I didn't see it that way. Like the boss says, I may be sort of dumb, but I couldn't get it in my head that Droyster was the kind of guy to bump himself off. It didn't jibe with the way he had come up. You don't beat your way to the top like he did only to kick off. If you lose your dough, you go after it again.

The whole thing smelled to me like a red herring, and now to have Alicia Droyster calling Smith....

THE boss put the phone down, leaned back in his chair. "Perhaps I don't give you enough credit, Willie."

"Yeah?"

“Droyster—the remarks you made about his death might be nearer right than I thought.”

The boss was usually blessing me out. He didn’t say things to make me feel good and I wanted to make the most of it. “Well, boss, now that you realize just how smart I can be sometimes....”

He laughed. “Oh, Willie, climb down. Alicia Droyster might simply be running a case of nerves—or greed.” He frowned, and it didn’t fit his face much. He looked back at me.

“Droyster was really broke, Willie, as flat as a tramp. Even the house he bought for his wife is mortgaged to the hilt. She said nothing to the police about his suicide, yet now she tells me she thinks it was murder. It doesn’t add up nicely.”

I didn’t get what he was driving at. I said, “Uh huh.”

He began sort of talking to himself. “All Droyster had left was insurance. And they do not pay off for suicide.”

I sat up straight. “Yeah! I get it! Nerves—or greed. If it was really suicide, the insurance isn’t worth the ink it took to print it, But if it was murder...”

He laughed softly, “I must give you a raise, Willie.”

“Honest?”

He looked at me a minute, then waved his hands, shook his head. He pushed his chair back from his desk. “Come along, Einstein, we’ll see the widow.” He crossed the thick carpet of his office to get his hat.

I heard him muttering, “A raise—honest?” Then he laughed a little, but, cripes, I didn’t mean nothing.

The big house that Droyster had bought for his wife gave me the creeps. It was a huge chunk of stone in the middle of a lot big enough for a park.

The boss paid the hackie who had brought us down and the cab pulled away. I tagged along as the boss opened an iron gate and started up the walk.

He didn't talk any when we reached the door. He punched the bell and in a few seconds a big-bellied guy in a butler's get-up opened the door.

"Mr. Smith to see Mrs. Droyster," the boss said. "She's expecting me."

The butler led us in. The inside of the house knocked my eyes out. There were pictures on the walls, rich drapes, and the furniture smelled of the good old mazuma. I went to my ankles in a rug that covered the whole floor. I thought it was no wonder Droyster had gone busted.

The butler tugged a couple of doors open. "You may wait in the library," he said, giving me a look that made me wonder if my hair—what there is of it—was combed.

I followed the boss and the butler waddled off to find the Droyster dame.

The boss began looking over the books that the walls seemed to be made of. I looked and spotted a big chair. But I didn't get to sit down. Somebody said. "Hello, Mr. Smith. I'm glad you came right down."

I turned and got set back on my heels. This was my first close-up of her and it was plenty all right. She had more than enough to go with the voice: a figure that could model bathing suits, a face that would drive a guy to drink, and long hair that was as black as the spots on the ten of spades.

She looked at me, then at the boss. Then she frowned. But everybody does that when they first see me and Smith together. And maybe we are sort of odd. He's the guy they invented all fancy words like elegant to coin. He's got his own tailor and his shoes cost twenty-five bucks. To top it off, he's got a sort of air about him that makes you think of Park Avenue.

And me—well, I'm just Willie Aberstein. It don't do much good to send my clothes to the cleaners. I guess I'm too short and too broad; a kid once screamed when he ran around a dark corner, smacked into me, and got a gander at my face. But I can't help that. I was never a daisy and having every pug in the east punch the face hasn't helped it any.

The boss said, "Mr. Aberstein, my assistant."

I nodded. "Pleased to meet you."

She came on in the room, waved us to a chair. I beat Smith to the big chair. She walked back and forth a little. Then she said, "You know why I called you here, Mr. Smith. I'm almost positive poor Mark was murdered." She tried to make her chin quiver, but it didn't go off. I marked her down a notch in my book.

"The calling card I mentioned," she went on after a minute. She reached into the pocket of her green dress and pulled out a white card.

"I found this under the bed in my husband's room this morning." She held out the card to Smith.

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ME AND THE BOSS both got up and I got a squint at the card over his shoulder. It was a very loud-talking card. It said:

A. H. Newell, Investments.

Right then and there I patted myself on the back. If Al Newell was mixed up in this, the whole business of Droyster killing himself by blowing off his kink was the bunk. I'd guessed right when I read the papers.

Al Newell owned part of a dog track that Droyster had promoted. I had wondered why the coppers had let the thing slide without so much as a how-do-you-do to Droyster's corpse. Maybe I knew why now.

Newell sort of had his way in City Hall. He was a slick-haired young guy who could tell people what to do. He had the dames, the dough, and the wrong kind of boys working for him.

The boss slipped the card into his pocket. "The card doesn't mean much, Mrs. Droyster. Simply that Al Newell was in the room where your husband met his end." He offered Alicia Droyster a cigarette, but she didn't take it. The boss lighted a smoke for himself.

"Perhaps Newell was in the room yesterday or even today. When did you find the card, anyway?"

"Just a few hours ago."

“And who has been in the room? You know, someone might have deliberately planted the card under the bed.”

She shook her head in a very serious way. “No one has been in there. Not even the housekeeper. I haven’t allowed the room to be touched.” She tried the chin quiver again. “You—you know how those things are.”

“Of course, Mrs. Droyster,” the boss said in a nice way. But I could see he thought it was a lot of pap. He knocked his ashes into a metal tray. He was tired of sparring. He said:

“You think Al Newell killed your husband and dropped the card from his pocket when he bent over your husband’s body?”

She didn’t have to force her chin to quiver then. “I didn’t say that! Don’t get me wrong, Mr. Smith. Al Newell—I’m only telling you the facts.”

The boss nodded. “And what about the Great Dane dog you mentioned over the phone?”

She was beginning to twist her fingers. “That was Jackie. He disappeared.”

The boss almost laughed. “I don’t follow you.”

“It does sound silly, I suppose. But it makes me feel afraid somehow. You see, my husband loved the dog almost as well as he—as he did me. Night before last, I heard the dog yelping out in back. Then he barked in pain and that’s the last I know of him. He was out at the little house we use for storage. I made a quick search out there but didn’t find the dog. He has simply vanished.”

I didn’t think the bait was very good. What was she trying to get us to do? Pin a murder rap on somebody so she could cash Droyster’s insurance?

The boss said, “I’m afraid I can do nothing. If there was something else you could tell me...”

“There is!” She seemed out of wind, like she had gone nine rounds. “There is! A man named Joe Dance phoned me. He promised to give me definite facts about my husband’s death, which no one else knows. I’m to meet him tonight at nine o’clock at the Greenleaf Bar on Canal Street.”

“That’s better,” the boss said. “You want Willie and me to interview Mr. Dance?”

She nodded in a hurry.

“Very well,” Smith said, “we will take the case. It will cost you one thousand—cash.”

That one was almost below the belt and it jolted her. Then she smiled. “That’s about all I have left, Mr. Smith”—I could almost see her thoughts—thousands of dollars of insurance money—“but I’m sure it will be worth it.”

CHAPTER II

THE guy who named it the Greenleaf Bar must have been punch-drunk. Or just plain drunk. It should have been called the Smokehouse. The place was jammed when me and the boss got there, and it was some brawl.

Me and the boss wrestled our way in. The tobacco smoke made my eyes burn.

Some of the big punks saw the boss and it was a scream to see them make room for him. But they knew Percival Smith. They knew he looked as soft as a wet sponge when he's more like a chunk of stone. He has shot more than one guy and he can handle his dukes. Me, I'm ready, but I'd want five to two before I'd take the boss on in what he calls fisticuffs.

A Greek and a slick-looking kid were working out behind the bar.

I thought for a minute the Greek was going to hug Smith. "Smeeth! You lika some gooda Scotch?"

The boss nodded. I said, "Give me some bourbon, Nick."

The Greek brought our drinks. The boss pulled out a five spot, waved it back and forth in front of Nick's eyes.

After the Greek digested the sight of the five, the boss said, "What are they saying about the dog track, Nick?"

The Greek looked all around, then back at Smith. "She'sa keep running. She'sa belong to Newell now."

"So?"

The Greek hunched his shoulders. He began swiping the bar with a towel.

"There wasa no contract."

"A thieves' agreement between Newell and Droyster personally, eh?" The boss downed a little of the Scotch and made a face.

"One more thing, Nick," he said. "Where is Pete Lorentz? Pete's been booking

my bets for over a year now. He's cost me a grand or so. Three days ago I placed a bet with him on White Lady. He was supposed to bring my winnings to my office, but I haven't laid eyes on him."

I remembered that. The boss had sure been in a stew because he thought Lorentz had run out. The odds on White Lady had been right and the boss had made a killing. He'd called all over town for Pete before he decided the bookie had taken a powder.

The Greek hunched his shoulders again.

The boss said, "Well, where's Pete?"

Nick grunted. "You keepa the five dollar, Smeeth. Pete—he's a none my business."

The boss was never one to dicker. He peeled five more off his roll. Nick licked his lips.

"I tella you then, Smeeth. Pete leave town. He have the fight with Mark Droyster the day Droyster killa himself. Pete—he mop floor over witha Droyster."

"And where did Pete go?"

"She'sa big mystery. No one see Pete since he hava the fight."

"Okay, Nick," the boss said. The Greek grabbed the dough. Smith said, "That drunk down the line needs a drink."

"You no tella what I say?"

"Have I ever, Nick?"

"No, you gooda fran, Smeeth." Nick moved away.

The boss and me parked in a booth to wait on Joe Dance. I kept looking at the clock behind the bar every now and then. Nine o'clock came, but Joe Dance didn't show up. I had another bourbon.

At ten, the boss said, "Dance isn't coming, Willie. Let's be toddling."

We went outside and the boss told me to hail a cab. I flagged one to the curb and we got in.

Smith gave the hackie Al Newell's address, which isn't far from Alicia Droyster's.

"You think we ought to go there, boss?"

"It's a lead." He didn't say nothing more for awhile. Then he said, "You know, Willie, it's all rather queer."

"What is?"

"Joe Dance and Pete Lorentz are great pals—and they both work for Newell."

I said, "Uh huh."

Smith said, "Look at it this way. Droyster and Newell own a dog track together. Droyster is dead—suicide they say—and Lorentz has vanished. To top that, Dance breaks an appointment with us."

"Maybe we should hunt Dance, boss."

He laughed. "We shall, Willie. We shall call on a great number of people."

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WHEN we got uptown, the cab turned a corner beside the Jackson building. That's where Smith's office is. The boss was looking out the cab as we went around the corner. He sucked in his breath like he had been punched in the stomach.

"Hold it!" he said. "We'll get out here."

The hackie pulled over and the boss tossed a piece of folding money at him.

I nearly had to sprint to keep up with him. "What in blazes, boss?"

He didn't say nothing. He just pointed up. I said, "Cripes!" There was a light in the boss' office. And we sure as hell hadn't left it burning.

The elevators had quit for the night, but Smith likes to be close to the ground. So we only had four flights to go up..

The boss must have thought it was time for a little road work, the way he took those stairs. We came to the fourth floor and I was winded. My tongue was hanging out, but Smith hadn't even started to sweat.

He whispered, "Keep those big feet quiet, Willie." Then he motioned to me and started toward his office like we were creeping up on a punch-drunk guy in a ring.

The light was still on. I began to get a tight, cold feeling in the pit of my stomach. I filled my paw with the old equalizer. Smith got out his key.

I had the room pretty well covered and he got the key in the lock without making a sound.

He twisted the key and banged the door open hard. I was all set to start throwing lead.

Then the air went out of me with a fizz. I put the gun back in my pocket and me and Smith looked at each other. Then we looked at the guy standing in the middle of the office.

He was a big bruiser, taller than me and just as broad. He had on a shiny old suit and a hat that looked like he found it at a dogfight. He could be a nasty egg sometimes. He was a plainclothes dick. They called him Bedrock Hannrihan, mainly, I guess, because he always dug to bedrock on a case and he didn't give a damn how he did the digging.

"Hello, Smith," he said, "this is more luck than I bargained for."

Me and Smith looked around the office. Hannrihan had been having fun. He had pulled the desk to one side, the big radio the boss loves away from the wall. He had even pulled the couch out in the middle of the room.

But the boss kept his temper. He didn't sound mad. "What do you want, Hannrihan?"

"Does it matter?"

“It does.”

I said, “Have you got a warrant?”

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I THOUGHT for a minute Hannrihan was going to bite me. “Listen, ape,” he said, “I don’t like you. You’re a smart aleck. You talk too smart. Just because you could beat a few guys’ heads off a few years ago and have a couple of Broadway dolls around, you think you are a gent.”

I took a step toward him. The boss said, “Easy, Willie.” He looked at Hannrihan. “Perhaps Willie is right. This sort of thing usually calls for a warrant.”

“Now, now, Smith. You’re not going to be that way are you?”

The boss looked at the mess Hannrihan had made. “Were you going to try the bookcase next? What the hell are you looking for anyway?”

Hannrihan smiled. “A corpse. Somebody squealed on you, Smith, said I’d find Joe Dance’s body here.”

My chin nearly hit my toes. “Joe Dance!”

Smith sort of stiffened. “Whoever called you, Hannrihan, must have recently escaped from the insane asylum. Have you checked there?”

Hannrihan said, “I’m not kidding, Smith. Now shall I get a warrant?”

“Why get a warrant now?” I said. “You’ve just about covered the place. The boss won’t mind you finishing.” I was giving him plenty of the Bronx cheer in my tone. “Why don’t you look in that closet over there, you grinning ape? Maybe we killed Dance, for no reason at all, and stuffed his body in that closet.”

Hannrihan’s face was about to gush blood. “I’ll do that, Mr. Aberstein,” he said softlike. “I’ll look there.”

He crossed the office and I couldn’t help it; I laughed until my head roared. The big dummy yanked the closet door open. The laugh choked up in my throat. I staggered back like I’d been punched with a hard left jab.

There was a coat hanging in the closet, but I didn't even see that. I couldn't see anything but Joe Dance's eyes. There were three of them, and the one in the middle of his forehead had spilled red down over his face. He'd never tell us anything about Droyster.

I couldn't move. I had to hang to the edge of the desk. Hannrihan started to turn around. But I couldn't do a thing about it. It took the boss to do that.

He swarmed all over the big cop. Hannrihan yelped, swung, but the boss hit him in the back of the neck with a rabbit punch.

Hannrihan went stiff, bounced up on his toes. His eyes rolled back. The boss hit him again and the floor caught the big dick.

I'd seen Smith do that before. His old man had wanted Smith to be a doctor; the boss knew every nerve center in a guy's body. That's what he had done to Hannrihan. I knew the big dick would be out ten or fifteen minutes until the nerves started working again.

The boss bent and looked at Dance. "Probably a thirty-eight slug, Willie," he said. "It's parked in the middle of Joe's brain—if he has one."

He closed the closet door. He took a look at me and laughed. "Feel sick?"

I nodded.

He stepped over Hannrihan. "Well, come along, Willie. We'll snap you out of it. We've a very busy night ahead of us."

"You're telling me!" I wobbled out the door.

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ON THE WAY to Newell's place, which is some dump, the boss relaxed in the cab like he was coming home from a picture show. Me, I opened the window and poked my head out. I kept seeing Joe Dance and the cold air helped.

"All we've got so far," the boss muttered, "is Mark Droyster dead, a dog track now owned in its entirety by Al Newell, a widow who wants insurance, a bookie named Lorentz who had a fight with Droyster and made tracks, and the corpse of

Joe Dance in the office of the Smith Agency.”

“Yeah, and a big bull who saw the corpse.”

The boss fired a smoke. I said, “Honest, boss, I was just making with sarcasm when I told Hannrihan to look in the closet. Cripes, I never dreamed that Joe Dance...”

“I haven’t blamed you, have I?”

“No, but still it makes me feel punk, me causing that ape to look in the closet.”

“Oh, forget it, Willie. He would have looked sooner or later anyway.”

“Well, that sort of makes me feel better.” Then I remembered those three eyes of Dance’s and had to get my head out of the window where the wind could hit it quick. It’s fine, the things cold air will do for you. It sort of knocked the grogginess out of my head.

The boss laughed. “Feel better?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. Wonder what we’ll find at Newell’s?”

“Your guess is as good as mine.”

Well, I guessed all the way down. I was sure we’d find plenty. But I was wrong. We didn’t find nothing. Newell’s apartment was as quiet as a graveyard. The boss kept buzzing the buzzer.

After awhile I said, “Nobody’s going to answer, boss.”

He looked at me kind of funny like. “That’s quite obvious,” he snapped. He tried the knob. The door was locked. “I wonder if the fire escape—”

He broke off when a door down the hall opened. We looked, and I could have hung around there awhile. The blonde standing in the doorway was some babe.

“I heard you ringing,” she said. “If you’re looking for Mr. Newell, you won’t find him.”

The boss gave her a million dollar smile. “Yes?” he said.

She smiled back. Then she frowned a little. “Mr. Newell is in jail.”

“Jail!” I said, and the boss gave me a dirty look.

The blonde nodded. “I can’t understand it. He hardly knew my name and he looked like such a nice fellow, yet he burst into my apartment this afternoon. He was so drunk he could hardly walk. He seemed to think I was some woman named Susan. I got him in the bedroom, locked him in, and called the police.” She giggled.

“What time was that?” the boss asked.

“About four o’clock. I—”

“Thanks very much, Susan.”

“But I’m not Susan, I tell you. I...” But me and the boss were already on our way.

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DOWN in the street again, the boss took a quick gander about. There was no bulls around, so we started walking.

I was sort of dizzy. I thought we’d come here and have a little fun choking the truth out of Newell about Joe Dance. But now...

The boss said, “It would be a nice alibi, being in jail.”

“Cripes, it would!”

“But I’m not so sure, Willie.”

“Well, I don’t know nothing, it seems like.” We walked on a little. There wasn’t many people out and we kept our eyes peeled for coppers.

Then an idea popped into my mind. “Listen, boss,” I said, “I got an angle. That sawbones, the one who went to the funeral with the Droyster dame. And, say: What about Alicia Droyster herself?”

“You mean Doctor Lawrence Jordan?”

“That’s right.”

“That’s too weak, Willie. Lack of motive. And I think Mrs. Droyster is out. It would be too risky for her to call us if she...”

“I’m not so sure, boss. People do the damndest things. Maybe she’s hoping we’ll pin it on somebody else. Maybe...”

“Stop it, Willie. I didn’t hire you to play Sherlock.”

“Aw, gee, boss. I was just trying to help.”

He slapped me on the shoulder.

“When I need you, I’ll whistle. Now come along, Willie, it suddenly occurs to me that I am a great lover of dogs.”

“You what....?” But he didn’t answer.

We walked a block, then turned into an alley that ran to the next street. It was a fairly wide alley and pretty dark.

We passed a platform that was used for loading I guessed. It was all messed up with old crates and boxes and big sheets of paper.

I knew we were headed for Droyster’s. It wasn’t far this way, taking short cuts. The boss didn’t want to use cabs much. Cops have a nasty habit of talking to cabbies.

Thinking about cops was bad. Hannrihan was chasing all over town by this time. I laid myself four to one that me and the boss was being talked about plenty on the police short wave.

I had to wipe my face with a handkerchief. What those cops would do if they caught us...

I never had the chance to put the handkerchief back in my pocket. A car had turned in the alley at our backs. Its headlights made a lot of light in that alley.

I turned around. The car was coming like a cannonball.

“The end of the street, boss. We’re close. Let’s go!”

He gave me a hard shove. “You fool! We’d never outrun them. Dive for that doorway over there!”

I scrambled across the alley. The car wasn’t a prowler car because there was no siren.

Whoever was in the car had a gun. He started using it. It sounded like a bowling alley with all the alleys full of guys making strikes. A bullet yanked at my coat sleeve.

I hit concrete nearly head first, rolled into the doorway. I got Bessie out of my pocket. Bessie talked back to the birds in the car. But I’m better with my fists than a gun and all Bessie’s bullets missed.

A bullet hit the steel door behind me. I heard the boss get his Spanish going. Somebody in the car yelped. The door behind me took another slug. Bessie roared again and I had the fun of busting a window out of the car.

Then the car was gone and I got up. I had got a glimpse of the guy driving the car. I couldn’t be sure, but there isn’t two guys like that in this world. He was the guy me and the boss wanted to see—Al Newell.

Percival Smith had been behind a steel garbage can. He got up, blew smoke out of his gun. He met me in the middle of the alley.

I had lost my handkerchief. I had to wipe sweat on my coat sleeve. “Some fun, boss. Me getting over there was a good idea. It made a split target of us.”

“Which surprised and rattled them,” Smith said, “and which enabled us to converge our fire on them from both flanks.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said, quicklike. “It was okay.” Once he got started talking like that, he was hard to stop.

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MY TICKER was just getting back down in my chest where it belonged. We took a few steps and the old heart started doing tricks again. But you couldn’t

blame it. Not with that harness bull's whistle going like it was. He was around the corner somewhere and he must have been blowing himself blue in the face.

The sound of the whistle got louder. I moaned, "They heard the shooting, boss."

"Yes, and this alley will be swarming with cops in two minutes."

He grabbed my arm, turned me around, and we started running back up the alley.

The cop kept blowing his whistle.

"That loading platform we passed," the boss said. "We'll shake them there."

Another whistle began blasting at the other end of the alley.

"Oh, oh," I said, "a cop at each end!"

We got to the platform. It was about waist high. We climbed up.

Those whistles were sure making a noise. Any second now the bulls would be coming in the alley—one from each end.

I didn't feel so hot. I remembered everything I had ever heard about the electric chair. It was like being in the ring with the other guy and the referee both punching you.

I unlimbered Bessie. The boss made a nasty sound in his throat. He grabbed my wrist, squeezed, and I nearly yelled.

"Aberstein, some day I'm going to fire you! Put that damn gun up!"

I did what he said, but I couldn't see any way out of this jam but to maybe kill a cop.

Percival Smith shook my shoulder. "Get a move on, Willie!" He didn't sound like any elegant guy now. He sounded tough.

He talked fast, in a whisper. "There's no chance of fighting our way out of this. There's nothing we can do but hide. Quick, get under this paper."

He lifted a big sheet of the old wrapping paper that had been around some of the

crates or boxes.

I got it then. I dropped down, scooted up under the paper. I lay against the wall. The boss got in beside me. The paper covered us. I hoped he had fixed it to look like somebody had just thrown the paper there.

The alley got quiet. That meant the coppers were sneaking along in the dark.

It took a long time for the cops to meet down in front of the platform.

It was ink black and hot under the paper. Somebody stepped up on the platform. He turned on a flashlight and light passed across the paper. I set my teeth to keep them from chattering.

“Maybe they were all in the car,” one of the cops said.

The other one didn’t answer. I heard him turn a crate over. He walked toward the paper that covered us. I reached slowly for the old equalizer. Smith felt my movement. He got his fingers around my wrist.

Somebody else out in the alley said, “What’s up, Kelley?” The alley sounded full of cops.

The bull on the platform said, “We’re not sure. There was a lot of shooting here in the alley a few minutes ago, but we don’t find anything now. Must have all been in the car that came tearing out the alley.”

Smith and me lay like two store dummies, right where Kelley could have reached out and touched us. Then after awhile Kelley got off the platform. Lady Luck was riding with us for a few seconds.

The boss wouldn’t let me move for a long time after they left. Just when I thought it was move or go crazy, the boss said, “All right, Willie. Take a look.”

I pushed the paper back, raised my head. I sounded like I was choking on something. “They’re gone, boss.”

We pushed the paper back and got up. Smith dusted himself off with his hands, wiped his hands on a handkerchief. He straightened his tie and we were ready to push off.

We took it easy getting out of the alley. We came to the street, and Smith hailed a cab.

He said, "Willie, this lark is becoming a bit too grim."

"You're telling me!"

"It will be most gratifying to meet the gentleman who is causing us this discomfiture."

He wasn't kidding. It would be nice to get our hands on the gent who had put the corpse in the closet and us behind the old black ball.

The cab turned a corner. Droyster's house wasn't far away.

CHAPTER III

WE DIDN'T use the front entrance this time. We sneaked across the lawn. It was a little after eleven, but there was a light on in the front corner room. We went toward the light.

We had to be careful getting close to the window. There was some dry shrubbery growing under the window and you could make a lot of noise walking in it.

We got to where we could see into the room. There was a good-looking doll in the room—Alicia Droyster.

She had on a fancy evening gown cut low in back. There was a guy with her I didn't recognize. He was young, slim, and had a small mustache.

They must have just come in from someplace. Alicia Droyster was mixing drinks. She handed the guy a glass that made my mouth water.

They touched glasses, downed the drinks. Then this guy put his arms around her and they started getting mushy. My knees got weak just watching. I could have looked at that for awhile, but Smith had seen enough. He pulled me away by the arm.

Out on the lawn, he said under his breath, "How very interesting!"

"You mean them two?"

"Yes, that was Alicia Droyster and Doctor Lawrence Jordan."

"Jordan! Boss, I told you—"

"Not so loud!"

"That sawbones, boss, I'll give you eight to three—"

"For heaven's sake, Willie, stop the deducting."

I didn't say nothing more. But it would sure be a laugh, I thought, if I was right.

We didn't have no trouble at all getting into the little storage house. The boss has a fine ring of keys.

He swung the door open. He shielded his pencil flash with his hand so nobody in the big house up front could see it.

There was some old furniture and books in the front room, piled all around.

The boss eased the door shut behind us.

"What are we looking for, boss?"

"I don't know."

"You what—? You mean we get shot at by Newell, hide from the cops..."

He grabbed my arm. "Newell? Did you say Newell?"

"Sure, boss, he was driving that car! I—I was so excited I didn't think to tell you before."

"Newell," the boss muttered like he had found a present of some kind, "Newell was driving the car, eh?"

Then he said, "Well, come along, Willie. We'll still seek our treasure."

"For pity's sake, boss, what kind of treasure?"

"I told you I don't know. Now shut up." He played the light around the room.

"Well, can't you just sort of give me an idea?"

"We're hunting whatever Jackie, the Great Dane dog, found here. Remember, Willie? The dog came here and barked. Then he vanished. If we find his corpse, or the thing he was after, we have found our treasure."

I thought of Bedrock Hannrihan hunting all over town. "I hope we find it."

We didn't find nothing downstairs but a lot of junk. We went upstairs. There were only three rooms here. The first was empty except for dust all over the floor. We walked to the door of the second room.

*

THE boss threw his light into the room. This room held plenty—too much. I took one look and got sick.

He was in the middle of the floor, what was left of him, lying on his back. His feet and body looked okay. But his whole head was gone. I shut my eyes.

When I opened them again, I was sort of sagging against the door, like a fighter hangs onto the ropes. Percival Smith was looking over the headless gent like he might look over a dozen roses.

I got my stomach well swallowed and took a look myself. He had been a big man. His clothes were dusty and wrinkled. There was no blood around on the floor.

Smith said, “Know him?”

“Maybe—if I could see his face.”

The boss laughed. I tried a grin.

“This lovely specimen, Willie,” Percival Smith said, “is our old friend—Mark Droyster!”

That knocked the sickness out of me. “Droy—you’re telling me that’s Mark Droyster? It couldn’t be! Droyster was buried yesterday!”

“Not actually,” The boss held out his hand, shined the light on it. On his palm was a ring and a small blue book. “Droyster’s ring, Willie. I just took it off the corpse.”

“And the book?”

“A bank book. It was on the floor, under the small of his back. I got it while you were taking a count. It’s a very interesting book.”

I said, “Uh huh?”

“It shows a withdrawal of fifty-seven thousand dollars made three days ago by

Droyster.”

I whistled. “This sure gums up things, boss. Anybody most would kill for that much money.”

“Yes, it is a complication. Unknown to the world, Droyster possessed a fortune three days ago.”

“But why is his corpse here, boss?”

“You can play Sherlock on that if you want to, Willie.”

I said, “Uh huh.” I pointed at the corpse. “And that’s why the dog came here.”

“That’s right. He came and barked. The murderer, for his own purposes, had taken Droyster’s corpse from the casket. The casket, due to the condition of the body, was never opened. The dog came here, found Droyster, and the murderer did something to the dog to silence him. Mrs. Droyster came and looked, but not very well. However, she did scare the killer off. He’ll have to return and dispose of this body.”

“Well,” I said, “I don’t understand every bit of your lingo. And I’m in one fine muddle. But if the killer has to come back, why can’t we lay for him here?”

“In the first place he might fool us and not return. And in the second, we’ve got to find the murderer before Hannrihan finds us.”

Even the mention of it made my mouth get dry. “Let’s not talk about Hannrihan, boss.”

We started back down the stairs. The boss turned off his light.

I whispered, “Where do we go from here?”

“Where would you like to go? Take your pick. You have Alicia Droyster, Doctor Lawrence Jordan, an absent bookie named Pete Lorentz, and our friend, Al Newell, to choose from.”

“Let’s see the sawbones!”

“Later. First we’ll see Newell.” He started to open the front door. “And, Willie, you can begin to earn your pay. I’m whistling for you now. We might have to beat the truth from Newell.”

“Lead me to it!”

He pulled the front door open.

I said, “I’ll wring Newell’s neck, boss. I’ll break him in two. I’ll...”

“Do nothing of the kind!” a voice said. Somebody else had a pencil flash. They threw it on us, standing so the light couldn’t be seen from the big house.

Percival Smith said, “Hello, Newell.”

“Hello, Smith, I’ve got a gun. So be careful. Now get back inside. I don’t want snoopers from the house.”

Newell moved from the yard to the porch. I could see his face above the flash.

Just like he was asking Newell in for a drink, Smith opened the door with his passkey.

“Go on in,” Newell said. He took a step toward us.

There wasn’t nothing to do but backpedal. Newell herded us to a back room. He didn’t get close to us. He wasn’t taking chances.

“Smith,” he said, “I had a devil of a time trailing you down here. In fact, I’ve been having a devil of a time all night—and just because of you.”

“That,” Percival Smith said, “is mutual. That was a very smart trick, Newell, putting the remains of Joe Dance in my office and calling the bulls.”

“What the hell are you talking about, Smith? You’re nuts!”

“Am I? Joe Dance worked for you. He was about to tell me a few things about Droyster’s death. You inherited a very rich dog track from Droyster and you were afraid Dance would spoil it by talking.”

*

NEWELL brought his gun up a little. I wished I could get some moisture in my mouth. Newell said, “So you know about the track?”

“Of course, what do you think I do with my time, knit? How much does the track payoff, Newell? Ten grand a month? Enough to commit murder for?”

“All right,” Newell said in a sort of icelike voice, “I’ll show you my hand—since I’ve got the gun. The track does payoff plenty. Mark Droyster never knew, because I kept the books and he was tied up in a dozen other different places. But I didn’t kill him or Joe Dance.”

“And you trailed us all the way down here to tell me that?” Smith said.

Newell laughed. “Don’t be funny. I came here to do what I tried to do earlier tonight.”

The boss just said, “Yes?” but my knees were banging together. I looked at Newell’s gun. It must be awful lonesome, I thought, with six feet of dirt over your face. But I couldn’t get close to Newell, not close enough to do nothing.

The boss said, “Earlier tonight you tried to kill us, Newell. Now you say you are going to finish it. Yet you claim you are a very innocent boy. I think you are a very funny boy. You tried to make me and the police think you were drunk this afternoon, when Dance’s corpse was planted in my office. You—”

“I was drunk, if you must know. I was in jail until just a few minutes before I found you and Gargantua in the alley.” He leveled the gun at Smith’s head. “I think you know too much, Smith. Maybe I should knock you off.”

“You tried hard enough once already,” I said.

Newell laughed. “Tried? There in the alley? That’s a joke. If I’d tried, you wouldn’t be kicking now.” He threw the light toward the boss. “No, Smith, I don’t want to kill you. In the alley tonight I merely tried to wing you, lay you up for a few days with a bullet in the leg. Or maybe scare you off the Droyster case. But I didn’t really expect that. You’re too dumb to keep your nose clean.”

Smith said, “Perhaps you need another drink, Newell—to sober you up. What are you driving at, anyway?”

“I’ve decided to change my tactics, Smith. Instead of putting you and that baboon in the hospital, I’m going to buy you off this case.”

The boss rubbed his hands together. “How interesting!”

“Two grand, Smith, to forget Droyster’s suicide?”

“Gracious!” Percival Smith said. “Willie, we must choose more generous company. We’ll settle for four thousand, Newell.”

“You’re a fool, Smith!”

“Four thousand?”

Well, I’d never thought the boss would do that. I’d sooner look at Newell’s gun than have Smith do this kind of business. “Cripes, boss, don’t do it! We—”

Newell said, “I must be crazy, but I’ll give you three grand.”

“It’s a deal,” the boss said.

That must have made Newell happy. He laughed. “I’ve heard different about you, Smith, but I guess you like dough as well as the next one.”

“Money is money, no matter what type hand handles it.”

This was slaying me and I’m not kidding. Me and Smith maybe don’t do everything real gentle, but having him do this was like finding out there is no Santa Claus. “Boss...”

Newell threw the light more on me. “The gorilla doesn’t like your way of working, Smith.”

“He will,” the boss said, “when I whistle.”

I got it then. Newell put the back end of the pencil flash in his mouth. He still kept his light on us, but having the flash in his mouth freed his left hand. He used the hand to drag out a pocketbook that was just about busting with dough. He put the pocketbook between his knees. He got three one grand bills from ‘it with his left hand. I was set.

Newell moved closer to hand the three grand to the boss.

He let the gun point away from me a little. That was bad. I was on my toes, just like in the good old ring days. The boss reached out for the three grand. He whistled real soft between his teeth.

*

I LET GO. It was a wallop that would have floored the champ ten or twelve years ago. Newell saw it coming, tried to swing the gun. The gun got all tangled up in the boss' fingers. My knuckles smashed Newell's cheek and the flash popped out of his mouth. He staggered, but he hung to the gun.

The boss twisted. I stepped in and hit Newell again. It was fine. The punk nearly left the floor. He sailed clear across the small room. I heard him hit the floor.

The boss picked up the flash, threw it on Al Newell.

Newell made a couple of tries and got his pins under him. The boss kept the gun on Newell. I picked up the slim punk's dough, put it back in the pocketbook, and handed it to him.

His eyes were nasty looking in the light from the flash. "I'll remember this, Smith!"

"Tish, tish, such talk—when I've got the gun," He cocked his head, looked at Newell a minute. "It will be a shame, Newell, a downright shame."

"What do you mean?"

"That face of yours, it's so handsome."

Newell lost some of his fire. "Listen now, Smith..."

"Willie will make mincemeat of you, Newell—unless you tell us the whole story of the guy in the closet."

"Now look here, Smith! You'd better watch your step. It wouldn't be healthy if you set that gorilla on me!"

“Indeed it wouldn’t—for you. Come now, tell me. You killed Droyster to get the dog track, didn’t you? Dance found out and you killed him to cover it.”

“No, Smith, you’re all wrong.” He was sort of having trouble with his voice. It kept shaking like a hula dancer. “I swear you’re wrong! I didn’t even know Dance was dead until my lawyer came to headquarters tonight to get me out of jail.”

The boss didn’t say nothing for awhile. Then he said, “Okay, Al, if that’s the way you want it. How many of your boys are outside?”

“None, Smith, I came alone.”

“Very well. We can’t stay here all night. If you want to be stubborn, we’ll have to have a little tea party someplace. Would you like some tea, Willie?”

“Sure thing, boss.”

“No, Smith, don’t do it.” He was nearly crying.

“Take him in tow, Willie,” the boss said. “And if he gets away, I’ll have your hide.”

I grabbed Newell by the shoulder. He was scared silly. He let me turn him around. I got his left arm in a hammer hold. I got my gun in my other hand and planted it in the middle of Newell’s back. He was in a bad way.

The boss turned off the light. “Let’s go.”

We went out the front again. I almost had to hold Newell up while the boss locked the door. We were out on the porch of the little house. The moon was playing around behind clouds.

“Listen, Smith,” Newell begged, “I’ve seen a couple of guys you have worked over and I don’t want it. I’ll tell you all about Droyster, if you’ll make this elephant turn me loose. You’re right, it wasn’t suicide. It was the most fantastic —”

And that’s as far as he got. Somebody in a patch of bushes not ten feet away had a gun. He used it. It sounded like an earthquake, the gun going off. Newell

slammed into me when the slug hit him. Then the somebody made a quick take off out of the bushes. Before me or the boss could get our roscoes going, the somebody was already around the corner of Droyster's big house and gone.

Smith snapped, "We've got to get out of here." Lights went on in the big house. "Hurt bad, Newell?"

"In the side."

"Let's get the guy, boss," I said.

"We'd never catch him now. Better let Newell go, Willie, he should get to a doctor."

A door slammed up at the big house. Somebody yelled. More lights went on.

I turned Newell loose. He wobbled off, nearly on his last legs.

"You and me, boss?" I said. We were already legging it across the lawn.

"We're going on a little errand. Too bad we couldn't have hung onto Newell. But if we had tried, he might have died on us."

"What kind of errand, boss?"

"We're going to dig a grave, Willie."

CHAPTER IV

ME AND THE BOSS shinnied over the iron fence that was supposed to keep people out of the graveyard. I didn't much want to move when we got inside the fence. There wasn't nothing but tombstones and graves all around. The way the moon was shining didn't make them look any better.

"Do we just have to do this, boss?"

"Of course. What's wrong?"

"Nothing—I guess. I sort of would like to get out of here, though."

He laughed and gave me a push with his hand. I wished I could laugh. I wonder what it is like to have a regular job so you can sleep at night instead of messing around in graveyards with a killer loose someplace and the cops just praying for a chance to get you in the little room at headquarters.

I followed the boss. He looked at tombstones every little bit. Finally he pointed to a big chunk of some kind of fancy stone, marble, I guess.

"This is it, Willie. Start digging."

We had gone by Smith's apartment on the way down here. The boss had found a short-handled spade way back in a closet. He had once used the spade for flower beds, but we wasn't planting petunias now.

He handed me the spade. I took off my coat, wiped the sweat off my face, and went to work.

I was about three feet down when I heard the voice. "What are you doing there?"

Then a light smacked me. I turned around gentlelike. I couldn't see the guy holding the light.

He said, "Are you the same one that was here last night?"

I shook my head. Where in hell was Smith? I took a step toward the light.

“Hold it!” the guy said. “I’m the caretaker here and I’ve got a gun on you. One more move and I’ll give it to you.”

He wasn’t kidding.

He went on after a minute, “What’s so interesting in that grave, anyway?”

What the devil could I say? I didn’t know what he was talking about even if my throat and tongue hadn’t been so numb.

“Didn’t you hear me?” he growled. “Last night somebody came here and now you. Why?”

I shook my head again. Damn that Smith!

Then I saw the shadow behind the caretaker. Smith hit him hard with his automatic. The sound of the gun on the caretaker’s skull sort of made me sick. He dropped his light and fell on the loose dirt I had dug.

“Cripes, boss, I was wondering...”

“Where I was? Merely taking care of you, Willie. That headstone over there made a nice hiding place.” He looked down at the caretaker. “Someone here last night, eh? How interesting!” Then he told me, “Keep working, Willie. This is no holiday.”

I went back at it. It was hot work. The closer I got to the coffin, the hotter it seemed to get.

I got the lid off the pine box with a screwdriver the boss had brought along. I handed the lid up to him. He was getting all in a huff.

“Hurry, Willie! Get busy—open the casket!”

That took longer. My hands had too much sweat on them to do what Smith wanted them to do.

This had been one more night, I thought. Nothing could floor me now. But when I opened that casket, I damn near passed out.

The moonlight that came into the grave made things plain enough to see. I wish it hadn't. There was a Great Dane dog stuffed in the casket. Blood was all over the inside, on the shiny white cloth. Somebody had cut the dog's throat wide open...

Smith got down in the grave so fast I thought he had fallen. He pushed me back, which was fine, and started messing around in the casket with his hands. I shut my eyes on that.

In a minute he stood up. He was holding a white pillow that had been dyed in spots with blood. He crammed the pillow under his coat and it made stiff, cracking noises.

Percival Smith laughed, reached in his vest pocket, and got out a calling card, his own card.

"It began with a card, Willie. It might as well end that way." It looked goofy to me, but he put the card on the dead dog's head, right in sight.

We climbed out of the hole. "Do we fill the grave back, boss?"

"No, but we'll have to tie the caretaker and hide him somewhere. I don't want him to find that card."

The caretaker was still out. We tied him up with our neckties and gagged him with Smith's handkerchief.

We got out of the graveyard fast, went back over the fence. We walked a block or two, and Smith flagged a cab that passed. "The Jackson Building," he told the driver.

*

WHEN we got back to the office, Smith turned on the light just like he was going to read awhile. He put the bloody pillow he had got from the casket on the desk. I looked in the closet to make sure Hannrihan had got Joe Dance's body out of there. He had.

Smith smoked a cigarette, walked around the office. He lighted another smoke from the old butt.

When he got through with that one, he looked at his wrist watch. “It’s been five minutes since we came back, Willie. You can turn off the light now.”

He pushed a couple of chairs together over in the corner. I turned off the light.

“Sit over here, Willie,” Smith said.

I went over and parked beside him in one of the chairs.

“Well,” I said, “this is all okay, I guess. But what’s the idea?”

“I’m hungry,” he said.

“Cripes, boss, who the hell are we waiting for?”

“Whoever finds my calling card.”

“And who’ll that be?”

“Perhaps the police,” he said.

“Oh, Lord!”

“Or perhaps the mild gentleman who left Joe Dance in the closet.”

“That’s better.”

Smith didn’t talk anymore. He leaned back in his chair. I knew we were in for a long wait.

After what seemed like a hundred years, I started to tell the boss it was no soap. I wanted to get out of here. This hanging around didn’t make me feel any too good.

But Smith caught my arm before I could say anything. And I heard it too—somebody putting a passkey in the lock.

The door swung back, covering us. The guy waited a minute, then came in. He was good-sized. I made a guess—Pete Lorentz, the bookie who had taken a powder.

He saw the bloody pillow in the light from outside. His breath made a funny sound. He jumped at the desk, got his hands on the pillow.

Smith turned the light on.

The guy wheeled around. Smith covered him with his automatic. I'd been all wet. This guy wasn't Pete Lorentz.

Smith made a little bow. "You almost got away with it," he said, "and it was a scheme worthy of a genius." He grinned at the guy. He said, "Mark Droyster—the man who wouldn't stay dead!"

Droyster didn't look so good. He hadn't had any sleep, and he needed a shave badly.

He didn't say nothing. He just looked at Smith and the Spanish in Smith's hand.

"Come on, Willie," the boss said, "we're taking him in."

But I didn't move. Somebody else had come in the office. He gave the orders, "No, Smith, you're not taking him in. Drop your gun. You, Aberstein, line up beside him."

The boss let the gun go. It bumped on the floor. Me and the boss turned around. Al Newell was bent over a little from the slug he had taken. There were two guys with Newell. Ike Clark, a little hophead, and Harry Haines, a skinny, tall gent who had shot his own brother a couple of years before.

Newell pushed the door shut. "You can scam in a moment, Droyster. If I let Smith take you in, people will know you are alive and I lose my dog track. So I'll help you, even though you did plug me earlier tonight."

My head was spinning. I finally got my jaw back up where it ought to be. "I thought that was Droyster's stiff in the storage house. I—"

"So did a lot of people, monkey," Newell said. "It was a fine plot, the nicest business deal Droyster ever cooked up. And I'm going to help him push it through. I'll take you to Hannrihan, Smith. Think he'll ever believe you when you claim Droyster is still alive?"

“You’ll tell him that the corpse in the storage house is not Droyster but Pete Lorentz. But will he believe it? Can you prove it? We’ll claim the corpse really is Droyster. So the only mystery the cops will have is why wasn’t Droyster’s corpse in the grave?”

It looked plenty bad. If Droyster got away from here, no telling where he’d be this time tomorrow.

Newell nodded to Ike Clark and Harry Haines. “Let’s get a move on.”

*

THE two torpedoes pulled their rods. The boss fired a smoke. “Are you quite sure, Newell, that you and Droyster haven’t overlooked anything?” The way he said it and the way he looked at Newell sort of did things to the slim punk.

“What do you mean?” Newell said. He held out a hand to slow Clark and Haines down.

“Shall we go back to the beginning?” the boss said. “Back to what drove Droyster to this?”

Newell and Droyster looked at each other. Droyster said, “Talk fast and it had better be good. If I’ve slipped I want to know it, but if you’re stalling...”

“In the first place,” Smith said, “you were slipping all around. Your house was mortgaged, your business enterprises—thanks to men like Newell handling the books—were shot to hell. Your whole life was exploding in your face, money evaporating, your wife giving you the air for Doctor Lawrence Jordan. You were losing, had lost, everything. You had been a big shot, now you were sinking to the level of a tramp.

“No man who has had your money and power, Droyster, would give it up without a fight. It hurt to see yourself as an old, broken bum, with people laughing and shaking their heads behind your back.

“But you had fifty-seven grand that no one knew about.” The boss laughed, puffed his fag. “This is the first case on record where a man killed other people for his own money. That’s exactly what you did. You were finished. There was only one way out—get away, start over. For a start you needed money. And the

only way to keep your fifty-seven grand was to die here and be another man someplace else. That fifty thousand dollars wouldn't have lasted long, what with all your debts, if you'd tried to leave in a legal manner."

The boss sat down like he had all the sweet time he needed. The others watched him like buzzards. Me, I was soaking my shirt with sweat.

"When Pete Lorentz gave you the beating," the boss said, "you got your big idea. It was a hard pill to swallow, having a two-by-four bookie beat hell out of you. It showed just how far you had slipped. You were so enraged you wanted to kill—and thinking about it started the plan in your mind.

"You killed Pete with a shotgun, Droyster. With your clothes and ring on him, and his head gone, everyone thought it was you. Neither of you had ever been fingerprinted. You knew Lawrence Jordan would swear the corpse was you, even if he did have a few doubts. He was that anxious to get your wife."

The boss put out his cigarette, fired another one. "So you were a dead man—with a nice stake of fifty-seven grand, no strings attached. But Newell happened to go into the room, drop a calling card, and your wife, wanting insurance, called me in. Perhaps Newell suspected the truth about you, Droyster.

"He dropped a few words around Joe Dance, and Joe thought to make himself a pile of dough by spilling it. But you had been hiding close around. You killed Dance and brought him up here, then called the police.

"Were you in that storage house most of the time, Droyster? Is there a phone extension there?"

"In the attic," Droyster said, "I heard Dance phone my wife and I heard her phone you."

The boss nodded. "That's why the Great Dane went out to the storage house, because you were there. He barked with joy and you slashed his throat to silence him. That was the same day you killed Pete Lorentz.

"That night you sneaked back into your house. You knew you simply couldn't have Pete up and vanish. If his draft board should put him in I-A and the F.B.I. went looking for him, it might have upset your scheme. You had to get Pete's body out of the coffin, mutilate it more, and plant it someplace where it could be

found, with papers to show his true identity, several days later.

“You took the dog’s body back into the house when you went after Pete. You took Pete out of the casket, put the dog in, knowing the casket would not be opened because of the horrible condition of the body. You knew it might take a day or so to dispose of Pete’s body, which was very ticklish business; so for safe-keeping you put your fifty-seven grand in the casket—in that blood-stained, satin pillow.

“You went to the graveyard last night, but the caretaker scared you off. You couldn’t get rid of Pete’s body sooner, and tonight I was on the case. You had to watch other things than the cemetery.”

“Yon talk well, Smith,” Droyster said, “but where’s the slip? Give out—and hurry!”

*

SMITH smiled at Droyster. “Let me finish. Newell gave you a bit of help all along. First he tried to gun us off the case, later to buy us off. He really wanted that dog track. You were hiding outside, Droyster, when we came out of the storage house. You heard Newell almost break down; so you took a shot at him.

“Naturally, I was wondering all along, since I found the corpse in the storage house, what the devil was in the casket. So Willie and I went to the cemetery. We found your money, left my card where you’d think I accidentally dropped it. You were pretty close on our heels. You found the card as I hoped.

“I left the light on long enough so that you’d not think I suspected you of shadowing me. You watched from across the street until the light went off. You waited until you thought we had gone, then you came to find your money.”

I saw just a little bit of sweat on the boss’ face. That made my knees bang. If Smith was sweating...

“Poppycock!” Droyster said. “He’s stalling. Take him on, Newell.”

Newell nodded. He started to say something, but the door crashed open.

Bless his heart! Bedrock Hannrihan looked like the answer to my prayers.

“Smith—” he howled. Then he flopped on the floor as Ike Clark got his roscoe going. I hit Newell and Newell hit the floor.

It was some party. Hannrihan’s gun went like a cannon. Droyster was cursing a blue streak. Somebody hit a chair. Ike Clark screamed.

Somebody slung a slug my way. It caught me in the leg, knocked me down. I looked up to see Harry Haines. The boss and me don’t like people that shoot at us. The boss shot Haines in the neck.

The bullet in my leg kept me on the floor. I rolled around. I was scared sick with all the lead flying loose. I rolled into Newell. He was drawing a bead on the boss and I hit him, I broke his nose with that one and blood went everywhere.

Then it stopped and my ears rang. Ike Clark was doubled up in front of the desk. Haines was on his back, blood coming out of his neck, Newell was over at the wall holding his nose and moaning.

Droyster hadn’t been touched. He dropped his gun, looked at the boss, and said, “You win, Smith.”

Hannrihan took a look at Droyster. “Cripes! I’m going nuts!”

The boss said, “Yes, quite true.” Then he helped me to my feet. “It’s only a flesh wound, Willie.” Then the boss turned to Hannrihan. He wised the big dick up to all that had happened.

“I talked myself blue in the face,” the boss finished, “and had just run out when you got here. I knew as long as the light stayed on there was a chance it would attract you or one of your boys.”

Hannrihan kept the live ones covered. “The light attracted me, all right. I passed and saw it. I’ve been combing the town for you all night, Smith.”

The boss tossed the bloody pillow to Hannrihan. “Watch the rent in the cloth,” Smith said. “There’s fifty-seven grand in that pillow!”

Hannrihan whistled.

“You may use my phone to get the meat wagon and reinforcements,” Smith told

him. “Willie and I are leaving now.”

The boss helped me downstairs. Hannrihan’s car was at the curb. We got a cab. “Central hospital,” Smith told the driver. He turned to me. “We’ll get that leg dressed, Willie. Then we eat.”

I leaned back. The morning air tasted sort of good. The sun came up. I hadn’t ever noticed before how good it looked, all red and everything.

I looked at the boss. He was looking at me. I don’t know why, but the first thing I knew we were grinning at each other and shaking hands to beat hell.

THE END