

An Exciting
Novelet



POSTSCRIPT TO AN ELECTRIC CHAIR

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

As Murray whirled like a cat, Reade flung himself from the sofa, knocked Addy sprawling and grabbed the gunman from behind

Justis Reade takes the trail of a murderer who allowed an innocent man to pay the penalty—and lands in a death trap!

CHAPTER I Suicide's Letter

TEN o'clock Friday night, Charles "Conky" Crehan died in the electric chair at the state capital. One hour later and a hundred and fifty miles away, in the city where Crehan killed Anthony Morgan—in another room of the Haymarket, the very hotel which had been the scene of the crime—Lou Anatole's body was found flat on the carpet.

The horrified hotel clerk, who had

entered via skeleton key in response to complaints from slumberers roused by the sound of the shot, noted the thin trickle of crimson that flowed from a powder-blackened hole in Anatole's right temple. He saw the pistol gripped firmly in the corpse's right hand, said "Gracious!" and fainted dead way.

Revived by a pitcher of ice water, he summoned the night manager of the Haymarket. The manager, in turn, summoned the police. It was Lieutenant Clint Sanger of the City Homicide who spotted the handwritten note on the tumbler-scarred

bureau top. It read:

I killed Anthony Morgan when he tried to turn me in to the police as a card sharper. When Conky Crehan was convicted for it I thought it was a good gag. I never thought he'd burn. Now he is dead for something I did and I don't want to live any more. This is good-by.

Lou Anatole

Lieutenant Sanger, a dapper, desiccated, light-haired plainclothesman with very light blue eyes and a mouth that spilt his face diagonally when he smiled, read it gain. Then, holding the suicide note carefully by the edges, he sniffed at it, sniffed again.

"Phew!" he exclaimed to the other representatives of the City law gathered in the threadbare room. "Smells like the parlor at Madam O'Brien's."

Then his mouth slanted in his smile and he stepped into an unoccupied room across the corridor to phone, and thus avoid leaving his prints on the instrument in the corpse's chamber. Lieutenant Sanger was a conscientious police officer. He told the patrolman, who had temporarily taken over the Haymarket switchboard, to get him the home number of District Attorney Merle Tennyson.

THERE was little of the politician about District Attorney Merle Tennyson. Watching him indulgently as he rose from a comfortable armchair in the living room of his big house on the Hill, Justis Reade thought he looked more like an oversized teddy bear or a quondam Yale tackle. Finally, across the top of his whisky and soda, the District Attorney's special assistant decided Merle was a combination of both. Added to this rugged amiability, however, was a level-eyed open idealism which the entire City trusted.

Reade, slender, dark-haired, sardonic,

immaculate, was his superior's diametric opposite—which was perhaps the root cause of their mutual devotion. An utter pragmatist, realism had led him to the same conclusions that had inspired Tennyson to become District Attorney on the reform ticket.

The City, Reade was convinced, could not afford indefinitely the cost of corruption. By far the more brilliant lawyer of the two, he had joined forces with Tennyson and between them, they were making quite a team. The execution of Conky Crehan was the first step against elements that had long made the City a sanctuary for wanted criminals.

True, it was a short step. If rumor were true, Roy Murray, one of the nation's deadliest gunmen, was hiding out somewhere in the corporate limits. But it was progress. Tennyson's self-evident honesty had cut deep into the shadows so long in control where more oblique attacks had been blunted and turned aside.

Reade drained his glass as Tennyson picked up the telephone, bent forward to refill it, thus missing the sudden sag of Tennyson's shoulders. They had been sitting out the death watch together here in Tennyson's living room, ears glued to the radio until the report of the execution had come in. Now that it was over, they had permitted themselves to relax.

Up to the very last moment, nagging worry had persisted lest someone should have reached the Governor and won a last-minute stay of execution. But no one had. Surprisingly, after a savage defense backed by Blaine Fairman, boss of the old regime, and his cohorts, only routine efforts had been made to set aside the conviction. It had been puzzling, especially since the evidence had been entirely circumstantial. But it was over now. Merle and the forces he represented had won the first round with a murderer's life.

"Justis!"

Reade glanced up after squirting just the right amount of seltzer water into his glass.

Merle's voice had an odd, hoarse timbre. He walked to his chair unsteadily, sank into it, staring straight ahead. His full mouth was oddly, unhappily twisted, his face gray.

"What's the matter, Merle?" Reade asked, sitting upright.

"That was Sanger," said the District Attorney, his voice still unnatural. "Lou Anatole just shot himself in his room at the Haymarket."

"After the heat we've been putting on all those boys, I'm not exactly surprised," said Reade. He didn't say it, but "good riddance" was in his tone.

"He left a note," said Tennyson. "In it he confessed to having killed Anthony Morgan."

The silence was like alabaster—cold, milky, translucent ... and hard as marble. It filled the living room around them, between them, shutting them off, each in his own chilled thoughts.

Quickly, almost without conscious volition, Reade reviewed the facts as he knew them, his swift, facile brain moving clearly, accurately. He knew the case perhaps better than anyone else. He had prepared the prosecution himself, had steered Merle Tennyson through the tortuous booby traps set up by the highly-paid defense.

Anthony Morgan had come to the City to swing a real estate deal. He had done so successfully. With the cash in his pocket, he had dropped into a bar to have a drink in celebration. There Conky Crehan had picked him up. The rest had followed an age-old pattern— more drinks, a hint of a game of chance.

MORGAN, feeling lucky already and increasingly expansive under the influence of alcohol, had been a plum ripe for the plucking. The game in a suite at the Haymarket had followed. Inevitably, Morgan had lost. Swift and sober realization of his plight had

followed. He had sought to pick up a telephone and call the police. Someone had hit him over the head with a bottle, fractured his head and killed him.

According to the case Reade had prepared and Merle Tennyson had carried through to completion so successfully, that bottle wielder had been Conky Crehan. He had been the pick-up man and the game had been held in his rooms. He had tried ineffectually to bolt, once the crime had been committed. He was a known card sharp and had a criminal record. It had seemed open and shut.

Merle and Reade had put extreme pressure on the case as their first major opportunity since attaining office. The City was becoming notorious as a place where strangers were being mercilessly fleeced. It was affecting business. The Chamber of Commerce and the business elements in the town, who were largely responsible for putting in the reform regime, had backed them to the hilt. And they had won.

Since the mob of which Crehan was a member had been paying fat sums for protection into political coffers, the old-line gang had done its best to protect him. They had hired expensive legal aid, tired every trick in the book. But the evidence, plus the defendant's record, had been incontrovertible.

But, thought Reade gloomily, Crehan might not have done it. There had been others engaged in the game. The number of glasses, of piles of chips, of cigarette butts, of cards, proved that. All of them had escaped before the police arrived on the scene.

And Lou Anatole had been known as a member of the gambling mob. He had been questioned, but had come forward with an alibi which was supported by a girl named Ivy Thomas, who danced at the Club Samba. Lou *could* have done it.

Reade glanced at Merle Tennyson, who had buried his face in his hands.

“Take a reef in yourself, Merle,” he said. “After all, Lou Anatole was hardly an ideal citizen.”

“That,” the District Attorney said through his hands, “is not the point, and you know it, Justis.”

“Okay,” said Reade. “But you can’t let this break you up. You can’t let it stop you.”

And as he said the words, something flickered inside him. What, he wondered, if this suicide weren’t a suicide at all? What if it had been contrived by the old-line political gang as a weapon?

Merle, wealthy in his own right, was incorruptible and they knew it. He had been hitting them where it hurt, was threatening to shatter the base of the graft-ridden organization that had been in control of the City for so long. They were cunning. And they were ruthless enough to carry through such a plan if it were the only way to break the strangling grip of Merle Tennyson.

“It *has* stopped me,” said Tennyson, lifting his head. He was like a man in a trance. “How can I ever prosecute another arraignee? I—it never occurred to me Crehan might be innocent. I shall resign my office tomorrow.”

“For Pete’s sake, don’t quit!” cried Reade, springing to his feet. “At least give me time to look into it. This may be a gag for all we know, just to drive you to resign. You may be playing into their hands!”

“The evidence against Crehan was circumstantial, and you know it, Justis,” said Tennyson quietly. Now that he had determined upon a course of action, his face regained something of its former purpose. He smiled. “I appreciate your wish to help,” he went on. “But I’d be wearing the butcher label to myself for the rest of my life.”

“Bushwah!” said Reade angrily. “I’m going down to see what I can dig out of this. If you quit, I’ll be stuck with the case anyway—if it is a case.”

“You’ll make a better District Attorney

than I, Justis,” said Tennyson. “You’re tougher—and cleverer.”

“But I don’t inspire faith, which is what the job needs right now,” said Reade from the doorway. He said no more, but snatched his hat from a hall table and ran on out to his convertible in the driveway.

CHAPTER II Elusive Scent

NORMALLY, it took twenty minutes to drive to the Haymarket Hotel from Tennyson’s big house on the Hill. Tonight, Reade made it in nine.

Striding into the hotel, he was in time to see a couple of coroner’s helpers lugging the body through the hushed and dingy lobby in a basket. Upstairs, he found Clint Sanger smoking a cigar calmly while his minions went through their technical routine paces.

“Hello, Justis,” said the Homicide lieutenant. “How’d Tennyson take it?”

“Just about as you’d expect,” said Reade. “What gives with this business anyway? It looks rugged.”

“It is,” said Sanger with his slanted grin. “But it’s one death they can’t blame on Roy Murray. Take a look at this.”

He pulled the suicide note from his pocket, handed it to the Assistant District Attorney. Reade studied it, then checked it with some scribbled lines which the deceased had penciled on the margin of a racing form. He scowled. Superficially at any rate, the handwriting was the same.

“Anything else?” he asked. Sanger nodded toward the suicide letter.

“Get a whiff of it,” he said. Reade bent over it and sniffed, glared at the detective.

“Remind me to buy you some decent cigars,” he said. “Those weeds of yours blanket all other odors.” He headed into the

corridor, tried again.

This time he got it—an elusive whiff of delicate and distinctly feminine perfume. Justis Reade, himself a young man of inherited means, had moved around considerably where the lights were bright during his thirty-two years. He knew quite a lot about women and something of the things they liked—lingerie, jewelry, flowers and perfume.

It seemed to him that this was a definitely upper case aroma. It was not the olfactory residue of cheap cologne, or any obvious scent. But it had a lingering lightness that did not usually come from any drug store product. All in all, it was a surprising scent for Louis Anatole to have left on a sheet of Haymarket Hotel stationary. He frowned.

Suddenly he thought of Ivy Thomas, the dancer who had provided the deceased with his alibi for the Crehan killing. There was probably nothing in it, but all the same, he decided, a talk with her might be indicated. He could think of nothing else to do at the moment.

Leaving the Haymarket, Reade toiled his car a half dozen blocks through the City and managed to park it in an alley around from the Samba, currently the rage after dark. Its marquee carried a poster of a Brazilian dancer outlined in neon with bunches of somewhat surrealistic neon bananas carrying out the tropical theme.

Inside a headwaiter greeted him with raised brows on the opposite side of a plush rope across the doorway to the dance floor. It was, Reade reflected, almost two years since he had shown his face around the City after dark. Politics and play had not mixed in his case.

He asked if he could see Miss Thomas after informing the one-headed cerberus who he was. The captain, now a study in servility, was sorry but Miss Thomas could not be seen just then as the show was to start in ten

minutes. Perhaps a table for Mr. Reade would be acceptable.

“Okay,” said Reade. He followed the captain, but was not destined to sit at the table selected for him. A rather throaty contralto voice hailed him as he passed a large party.

“Hi! Justis Reade!”

He stopped, looked down to see an extremely comely young woman smiling up at him, her vermilion lips parted in an engaging grin. Dark blond hair fell in a perfectly-groomed heavy wave to a bare white shoulder that gleamed as white as the white satin strapless evening gown she wore.

IT WAS Adelaide “Addy” Fairman, eye-crashing niece of and official hostess for James G. Blaine Fairman, long the political boss of the City.

“Hi, yourself, Addy,” he said. Momentarily he wished Addy Fairman were not who she was. It meant foregoing so many things that otherwise might have been. Or was he growing ancient enough to have an old man’s dreams?

Next to her sat Monty Weir, redheaded, dynamic and more attractive than any man so homely had a right to be. He was in full evening regalia and the sight of his fingers resting possessively on the firm curved flesh of Addy’s forearm caused Reade’s blood to stir unpleasantly.

Weir was a young man who had traded his considerable birthright for a mess of imported scotch, expensively dyed blondes and more horses than song. Ultimately his father had regretfully put him on his own and a welter of bad checks had been the result. But Weir had finally settled down and won himself a job as Blaine Fairman’s personal and confidential secretary—thus gaining access to Addy, a blonde whose hair color was her own.

“Sit down, Justis,” said Weir. “You haven’t showed in one of these spots in a

coon's age."

Weir, Reade decided, was not suffering from sobriety. He glanced at Blaine Fairman, who sat at the head of the table like a great white-shirted Buddha. Seeing the boss of the City in the flesh, of which there was a great deal, the Assistant District Attorney always found it difficult to believe any evil of the man.

There was a leonine magnificence about Fairman that made him appear as if any chicanery were beneath him. Yet behind that immense forehead, Reade knew, lurked more unsavory secrets than were stored anywhere else in the City. His smile at the new arrival was a shining expression of open friendliness.

"Sit down, young man, do," he said. "Frenchy will move over."

"Frenchy" Dulac, short, stocky, swarthy and impassive, rose from his chair to make room for Reade. Dulac was Fairman's bodyguard and, if rumor were true, something more deadly on occasion. But rumor had never become a proven fact. Dulac muttered some sort of greeting as Reade dropped into a chair.

Studying the others briefly, Reade was struck by the aura of festivity that clung to all of them but Frenchy. In contrast to his own dark mood, the feeling of light-hearted gaiety was the more marked.

"This looks like some sort of celebration," he said.

"In a way, it is," said Addy, again smiling at him.

"Any particular occasion?" Reade asked.

"Nothing special," said Monty Weir, "We happened to remember we haven't had a party for a long time. Why?"

"It seems an odd night for it, that's all," said Reade with unmistakable emphasis.

Reade's eyes went from face to face during the silence that followed. The band had concluded a number with a pseudo-Krupa

burst on the drums, and the stillness was deafening. Frenchy scowled at the table. Addy looked around at the others as if wondering what ailed them, a little line of perplexity between her symmetrically curved brows. Monty Weir looked blankly at nothing, his ruddy eyebrows lifted a trifle.

It was Blaine Fairman who broke it. Nipping off the end of a costly-looking panatella with a well manicured fingernail, he put the cigar carefully in his mouth and leaned toward Reade.

"Will you give me a light, Justis?" he said quietly. "My lighter just quit working."

"Certainly," said Justis. The old boy was certainly imperturbable. Once the cigar was burning, Fairman sat back, blew three perfect smoke rings and watched them slowly dissolve in the air above the table.

FAIRMAN had a thoughtful expression on his face as he pursed his lips.

"When you have seen as many people pass on as I have," the boss said, and reluctantly Reade had to admit the choice of words was perfect, "one more death, whether it comes from natural causes or by the hand of the state executioner, grows less important. Because I was committed—and mind you, Justis, I'll deny this if you try to make anything of it—I did my best to defend Crehan. The jury found him guilty and our appeals were denied. My hands are clean."

"Why so solemn about it, Just?" Addy asked. "I should think you'd be feeling pretty good."

"Ouch!" said Reade. He smiled faintly, then his face settled in grim lines. "Unfortunately, something has happened since. Lou Anatole shot himself tonight and left a note, confessing to the crime, on his bureau at the Haymarket.

Again he studied them, seeking some response to his bombshell—if it were a bombshell. Blaine Fairman's eyes narrowed

into slits framed by little rolls of flesh and he rolled the cigar in his mouth. Frenchy Dulac lifted his eyes and stared at Reade unfathomably. Monty Weir hiccuped loudly and lifted his napkin to cover his mouth apologetically and a trifle too late.

But Addy Fairman turned white beneath her makeup and gripped the edge of the table as if she were afraid she would faint. Studying her covertly, Reade wondered why the news should affect her. Blaine Fairman's voice broke in.

"That's rather rough on Tennyson, isn't it?" he said, his tone as steady as a crooner's on a low note. "How is he taking it, Justis?"

"How would you?" the Assistant District Attorney asked.

"When you have been through as much as I have," the boss said, "you develop a certain philosophy. But Tennyson is a young man."

"Young," said Reade. "And a man." His eyes were on Addy. "But I've brought enough gloom already. Addy, may I have this dance?"

The girl rose a trifle too quickly, as if Reade had offered her a welcome relief from something. A moment later they were swinging out smoothly to one of the newest song hits. The band, although its members wore ruffled shirts, was about as Brazilian as "Muskrat Ramble." They played that way, but excellently.

Dancing with Addy was always exciting for Reade. She seemed to fit perfectly into the curve of his arm, to follow him as if she sensed his every move before he made it. Her perfume was heady, sweet, dry at once. Almost subconsciously he sniffed at it. But it was not the scent of the envelope.

"Do I smell bad or something?" she asked.

"Divine," said Reade, hoping he wasn't blushing. "What is it? It's new to me."

"A special blend from Frangois," said the girl. "And I suppose you have them all catalogued, you wolf."

"Rather a passe wolf, I fear."

"You needn't be," said Addy and there was a distinct gleam in her eyes. Hang it, she was disturbing him again, and tonight of all nights.

"I wish I could—for you," he replied. "But what's the use? You're devoted to your uncle and I'm after his scalp. We'd be throwing things in a week."

"You're wrong about Blaine," she told him seriously. "He's a much maligned old darling. I know."

"I hope you're right, Addy." Then, slowly, "What upset you so when I told you about Anatole? You didn't know him, did you?"

"No," she said. "But I delivered a message for Blaine to the Haymarket yesterday afternoon. This place felt—rather close, that's all."

"Whom did you deliver it to?" he asked sharply, his thoughts clicking rapidly. Yesterday afternoon was when the Governor had turned down the last appeal for a reprieve. Addy sometimes ran errands for Blaine when he was busy. If her perfume weren't different—

"I don't know," she said. "It was addressed to a Mr. Hartshorn. I was told to give it to one of the bellboys—Rorey, I think his name was."

"Thanks, honey," he said, then put his mind on their dancing until the set ended. It was not difficult.

The midnight show came on when the music ceased.

Sitting at Blaine Fairman's table, Reade paid little attention to it until Ivy Thomas was announced. And after one look at her unappetizing torrid gyrations in a so-called muscle dance, he let his eyes rest on Addy.

CHAPTER III
Silent Dancer

WHEN the show stopped, Reade excused himself and went backstage. "Backstage" was a grimy corridor that reeked of an odor compiled of equal parts of powder, grease paint and sweat. He knocked on the door of the dancer's dressing room and was told, in a throaty voice, to come on in.

Ivy Thomas, her theatrical makeup still on and wearing a dark blue traveling suit, was kneeling on a suitcase to force it shut as Reade entered. After finishing the job, she looked up at him and her face went white under the twin circles of rouge on her cheeks.

"Going somewhere, Ivy?" he asked, leaning against the door jamb. He sniffed and winced. The dancer's perfume had all the delicacy of a garbage wagon. She rose slowly to her feet, glaring at him, and pushed blue-black hair back from her face.

"And how I am!" she said in a voice reminiscent of Gravel Gertie. "My contract here is up and I'm grabbing the one-thirty to New York. What's it to you, copper?"

She knew Reade. He had questioned her during the investigation of the Anthony Morgan murder. And she had made no bones about her dislike for him and all other minions of the law. Reade shot in the dark.

"So you sold out Lou to Mr. Hartshorn and now that you've been paid off, you're scrambling—or are you?"

"What kind of double-talk is that?" she asked, but her voice had acquired a new tremolo beneath its defiance.

"Lou's dead—shot—and you know it, Ivy. The police think it's suicide, but they don't know about Hartshorn yet. If I were you I'd cash those tickets in and stick around awhile—unless you want to be pulled off the train."

"But they told me they weren't going to—" she began, then caught herself. Her eyes hardened. "What kind of a pitch are you throwing, copper? I had dinner with Lou tonight. He's okay and you know it."

"I'm afraid not, Ivy," said Reade quietly. "They crossed you up. Maybe you know—or maybe you were just tired of Lou and they told you they'd fix it so he wouldn't follow you to New York." He paused, watching her sink onto the wooden kitchen chair in front of her dressing table. "Feel like talking about it? I'm in a listening mood."

"Not to you, copper, not to you," she said, but her hoarse voice was barely more than a whisper. Only her eyes were defiant, still burning their hatred at him. He shrugged, knowing Ivy of yore.

"All right then, take your time," he told her. "But take it in the City. I'll be around later."

He turned on his heel and left her there. Apparently this Mr. Hartshorn, whoever he was, was a new factor in the case. Leaving the Samba by the service entrance, Reade drove back to the Haymarket and put some questions to the desk clerk. The clerk shook his head.

"There has been no Mr. Hartshorn registered here in the last month, Mr. Reade. I'd remember that name if I saw or heard it. It's an odd one, all right."

"Maybe that isn't the name he signed on the register," said Reade, frowning. If this were another dead end, he was up against it. And whatever could be done had to be done fast. An afterthought struck him.

"Do you have a bellhop here called Rorey?"

"Sure, Rorey Burke. He's on days. Smart lad."

"So I've gathered," said Reade. "Do you have any idea where he can be reached now?" He wished he had Sanger's police resources just now. But although he was

inclined to trust the Homicide lieutenant's basic honesty, the Department was a sieve. He'd have to do it alone.

The clerk went into the office behind the hotel desk, emerged in a few moments with a scrap of paper.

"Burke has a room at Seventeen North Trent Street, Mr. Reade," he said, handing the paper with its written address to the Assistant District Attorney. "That's down by the tracks. He should be there, but you know how those boys are on their own time."

"I've heard rumors," said Reade.

HE THANKED the clerk, went outside and sat in his car. His next step might be all-important. Mr. Hartshorn, who and whatever he was, was the only chink he had found in the wall someone had so carefully built up around Anatole's death. Hartshorn and a lingering perfume on the suicide note. It wasn't much to go on, but it would have to do.

The bellboy, Burke, might or might not be in his room. He might or might not know who Hartshorn was—and if he did, might not be disposed to talk.

On the other hand, Reade was certain that Ivy Thomas *did* know. He was going to have to make her talk. She, too, lived at the Haymarket, the City's one "sporting" hotel, but had not come in yet.

Starting the motor, he drove his convertible slowly back toward the Samba, checking to see if she were walking back to the hotel. Of course, if someone drove her or she took a cab, he'd miss her.

It was a risk he had to take. The City, he thought, was certainly showing little improvement under the new regime of which he was a part. So far, for the record, they had convicted only one killer—and the wrong man at that. Now, unless he were way off the beam, a cold-blooded murder was going to get by as suicide. And Roy Murray, if in town, was at large. Reade's long chin shortened as

he pressed his lips together in determination.

Once this wretched business was cleared up, Reade determined, he would get Merle to swear in a lot of husky bright young veterans they knew as special assistants, even if it meant money out of his own pocket. Then they would get to work and really root out the underworld in the City—and if Roy Murray were hiding out here, they'd get him. That would put all of them on the map.

He found the Samba officially closed. But the waiters were piling chairs on the tabletops for the night. The captain, not such a forbidding figure in shirt sleeves, was superintending the job.

Reade hailed him and asked if Miss Thomas had departed yet.

"She may have left by the service door," the servitor replied, shaking his head from side to side. "But she hasn't come through here yet, tonight. Maybe she's still back there packing. Her contract is up."

"I know," said Reade. He slipped the man five dollars and went on through. Crashes of pots and pans in the kitchen sounded through the thin partition that was one wall of the corridor. Ivy Thomas' door was closed.

Feeling as if he'd missed the boat badly, Reade opened it and entered—and stood stock still, just inside, staring in amazement at what he saw there.

Ivy Thomas was sitting on the floor with her back against the wall beside her dressing table—and so much blood covered her that she looked as if a bucket of paint had been thrown at her. Apparently she had been shot through the throat. Gore had splurged up to splash her face, had spilled all over the front of her dark blue dress, into her lap and ultimately to form a pool around her on the floor.

At one side of the room stood the swarthy, burly Frenchy Dulac. He was staring at the dancer's body as if his eyes were held in that direction by a magnet. Then, suddenly, he

jumped like a startled hare, turned and saw Reade standing there looking at him.

“*Dieu!*” he said softly. Then in English, “Do you know who has done this terrible thing, Mr. Reade?”

“Are you kidding?” the Assistant District Attorney countered. A cold rage was sweeping over him. Something about the dead woman was reminiscent of a child’s doll that had been wantonly smashed and defaced. No longer was she a brash, unpleasant, undoubtedly evil creature of cheap jobs, cheap romances, cheap defiance of the law.

And this hirsute gorilla with the face of a retired pug had the nerve to put such a question to him. Reade was so angry he walked right up to Blaine Fairman’s bodyguard and held out his right hand, palm up.

“All right, Frenchy,” he said quietly. “Let’s have the gun.”

SO AUTHORITATIVE was his tone and manner that the bodyguard made a move to obey, then caught himself and pulled his hand down from his lapel. His beetling black brows met above the bridge of his nose.

“Hey, Mr. Reade,” he protested. “I didn’t kill her. I only came to get her for Mr. Fairman. He wants to talk to her. I found her like this.”

“Hand it over, Frenchy,” said Reade inexorably. The Canadian stared at him, looked down at the outstretched hand. Comprehension dawned in the little black eyes.

“You don’t believe me, do you, Mr. Reade?”

“Not for a moment, Frenchy. Let’s not kid around. You’re on the spot, and there’s nothing you can do about it. Killing Ivy and getting caught at it was pretty stupid. Much stupider than the way you knocked off Lou Anatole. But you’re not dumb enough to try to shoot me. So let’s have that gun of yours.”

“What are you going to do, Mr. Reade?”

“I’m going to turn you in, Frenchy. What did you expect?”

Frenchy’s feet shuffled and he swung around to face Reade. His right shoulder dropped a trifle.

“Mr. Fairman isn’t going to like this,” he said, almost mournfully.

Reade got the idea then. This professional muscle man was going to knock him cold if he could. Instinctively the Assistant District Attorney fell into a posture of defense and poked his own left out. He had boxed a bit at college and had kept in shape since with gymnasium workouts. He had height and reach on Dulac even if the burly one outweighed him in pounds and experience.

Remembering the ancient advice about landing the first punch, Reade jabbed with his left, low, then pivoted and crossed with a down-chopping right hook. The blow had every ounce of momentum Reade could put behind it.

Frenchy never even ducked. He took it flush on the chin, apparently without ill effect. Reade felt as if his right hand had been caught in a cement mixer. He could almost hear the ripping of skin across his knuckles. And then, before he could regain his balance, he saw the Canadian’s right fist coming up toward his own chin in a short, sharp uppercut.

For a fraction of a second after the blow landed, Reade thought that his head was being lifted right off his shoulders. Then the whole room seemed to explode in a single sheet of light, which was followed by merciful darkness.

He came to, less than three minutes later according to his wristwatch, to find the waiter captain swabbing his face with a cold towel. The captain was desolate.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Reade. It shouldn’t have happened here. Tell me who did it and

I'll have him fired."

"Cut it!" snapped Reade. He felt as if his neck had been permanently stretched. His head was ringing as if someone had struck a gong inside of it. But the sight of Ivy Thomas' body, still covered with blood, staring at him with sightless eyes, brought him out of it quickly.

"What about *her*?" he snapped. "Have you called the police?" As the captain nodded and explained that he had already had that matter attended to, Reade struggled to his feet. The back of his head was sore too. He must have bumped it on something as he fell.

"When Lieutenant Sanger gets here," he ordered angrily, "tell him to put out a call for Frenchy Dulac on my orders—and to get him if he wants to keep his job."

"But, *monsieur*, where are you going. You can't—"

"Oh, yes I can," barked Reade, striding toward the service door. "Tell Sanger I'll call him up later."

It was Sanger's job to get Frenchy. As for himself, he had only one clue remaining—Rorey Burke, the bellhop. He didn't intend to bungle that one.

CHAPTER IV Hideout

COOL night air cleared Reade's ringing head as he drove down into the slum district of the City toward North Trent Street. Like a shock of cold water it struck him that he had probably been responsible for Ivy Thomas' murder. His mention of the mysterious Mr. Hartshorn had scared her. His news of Anatole's death had apparently jolted her too. Or had it?

At any rate, the poor little fool must have gotten in touch with whoever was behind the deal. And Frenchy Dulac had been right

there in the club, his gun in a shoulder holster. Reade didn't need a diagram from that point. He hoped Sanger would be able to pull in the gorilla, and fast.

But at any rate, Reade was now certain his hunch had been true. Anatole's suicide had not been a suicide at all. Someone had shot him dead in cold blood in a desperate effort to crack Merle Tennyson. And unless Reade could find the killer and proof of what lay behind the crime, the move was going to be effective.

If Sanger could only get hold of Dulac in time—and make him talk! Reade's face was taut and strained as he turned his convertible into Railroad Avenue. From somewhere close by a train whistle tooted dismally. A glance at the dial of his watch informed him that it was one thirty-two. If he hadn't stopped her, Ivy Thomas would have been on this train, alive and safe.

Angrily he reminded himself that one Merle Tennyson was worth a thousand Ivy Thomases, dead or alive. He also realized that his jaw was going to hurt like blazes in a little while. Frenchy packed a terrible wallop in his right fist.

North Trent Street, a dead-end one-block alley that ended at the tracks, was in the process of being repaved. A pair of sawhorses with red lanterns dangling from them informed him of the fact. He swung on past and parked just beyond. The smell of garbage stung his nostrils as he climbed out.

Number Seventeen was one of a number of shabby, multiple-family tenements whose railroad grime was mercifully hidden by the darkness. As he climbed the worn front steps, Reade shivered. The night around him seemed alive with the terrible unsleeping vitality of the slums.

Lighting a match, Reade peered at a battered row of name-card holders by the almost paintless mail boxes in the front entry. Rorey Burke's name was there, printed in

pencil, apparently on the third floor front. He tried the front door, found it unlocked. No one here was supposed to have anything worth a burglar's effort.

Dim bulbs in the hall showed him a scratched public box phone, and stone steps, worn down on their treads like the marble roads of ancient China with their two-foot-deep wagon wheel ruts. Slowly, for his head still hurt him, he walked up two flights, rapped on a door. A sleepy voice within asked him profanely who he was.

Again the door was unlocked, and Reade pushed on inside. The room was dark, but a light went on and Reade found himself gazing at a tousle-haired, slender fellow with a broken nose not quite in the center of a pallid, young-old face. He'd been sleeping on a filthy cot in a sleeveless undershirt. His hand was on the string above the bed which turned on the unshaded ceiling light. The room also contained a battered chair and table, one window, and an unpleasant musty aroma.

"Rorey Burke?" the Assistant District Attorney asked.

"That's the handle," said Burke, looking curiously at his visitor. "What's it to you?"

"Maybe nothing," said Reade. "Sorry to rouse you like this, but it may be important. Cigarette?"

"Okay," said Burke, accepting the butt and a light. He inhaled deeply, blew out the smoke through his nose. He looked up at Reade expectantly, saying nothing.

"I'm Justis Reade," said his visitor, giving his position.

ROREY'S eyes widened briefly, then narrowed.

"And what would the Assistant District Attorney be wanting with me?"

"All you know about a guy named Hartshorn at the Haymarket."

"What's it pay?" the young-old man

asked.

"Plenty—if it pans out," said Reade. "You'll have to trust me on that."

"Okay, boss," said Burke after studying Reade for a long moment through narrowed eyes. "You look like a sucker so I guess it's all right. The only trouble is I don't know much about him."

Reade laughed at Burke's bluntness. He only hoped the bellhop wasn't going to embroider fact to make his story more palatable. He debated giving him some money now, decided it would only be a further inducement toward lying.

"Let's have it, Burke."

"The guy was in Three-ten," Burke said. "He didn't come out at all the last three weeks. I slipped his meals and booze to him from the kitchen because he didn't want anyone to know he was there. He made it worth while—if he ain't still in the shack."

"It's highly doubtful," said Reade, pacing the uneven floor. "But you'd know him if, you saw him?"

"I'd know him in the dark," said the bellhop with confidence. Reade smiled, pulled a fifty from his wallet, handed it to his informer, who took it with a casual glance.

"There'll be three more of these when you finger him for me," said Reade. "Thanks a lot, Burke. Sweet dreams."

He closed the door behind him, went on down the two flights of steps to the street. As he swung out of the entry-way, a man moved from the shadows beside the door and swung a massive hand at his head.

Made doubly conscious of assault by his experience with Dulac, Reade ducked away from the blow. He was not entirely successful, for the hand struck his shoulder, but apparently his attacker was trying to collar him rather than to hit him. Even so, the shock of impact was staggering.

He reeled back into the entryway, glanced wildly around the dimly lit hall for a

weapon. It was as bare as the old lady's cupboard in the nursery rhyme. Frightened, Reade wished his gun were not locked in the dashboard compartment of his car. He looked around for a place to flee, for some shelter. He had lost faith in himself as a master of rough and tumble.

He froze as he heard the swish of rapidly scuffling footsteps, his stomach turning over. Then he realized with almost sickening relief that they were receding, not coming toward him. Suddenly they stopped. Whoever his attacker was, he had not gone far.

With new awareness, Reade raced back up the stairs and reentered the bellhop's room. Burke turned the light on again and gazed at him curiously.

"Is this getting to be a habit?" he inquired.

"I hope not," said Reade. He spoke incisively. "I was jumped just now in the entryway, Burke. I asked just one other person tonight about Hartshorn. Ivy Thomas. She's already dead with a bullet in her throat."

"Miss Thomas!" said Burke, sitting upright. "Holy cow!" His oddly faded eyes widened. "Then you mean I may be next in line?"

"Exactly," said Reade. "Put on some clothes and show me a back way out of here. I think the fellow pulled out when he saw it wasn't you. You're coming with me and staying under cover."

"Protective custody?" the bellhop asked. "No jail."

"No jail," affirmed Reade. "I'm going to stash you in my own apartment. It's the safest place I know of. Get moving."

BURKE made no objections. He pulled on a pair of pants with about six too many pleats, donned a checkered open-neck shirt and a coat with a belted back. Red-and-blue imitation Argyle socks came next, then a pair of low

buff shoes with fringed tongues. The whole process took about three minutes.

"Let's go, boss," said Burke, pulling out the light.

Cautiously they descended to the ground floor. No one was in sight, and Burke led the way toward the rear of the building. A squeaking metal door opened onto a flight of wooden steps which led in turn to a junk-filled back yard. This led to an alley which brought them tortuously through to the next dead-end street. There Reade took the lead and they reached his parked car in safety.

He left explicit orders at the desk of his apartment building before taking the bellhop upstairs. Within his own rooms, he offered Burke the pistol which he had removed from his car.

"Keep it on you," he said. "Don't answer the door or the telephone. I have my own keys."

"Okay, boss," said Burke. "But what about this heater? I haven't got a permit for it."

"I'm giving it to you," said Reade. "Here's where you sleep." He led the way to the spare bedroom, showed his guest the bathroom, the kitchen, where the whisky was. "I'm going out for a while—business. Just sit tight. The fire escape passes under my bedroom window. It's locked. Keep it that way. Got it?"

"I'm not crazy, boss," said Burke. "And this is quite a dump."

"Glad you like it," said Reade. "So long."

Reade drove back to the Hill. The light was still on in Merle Tennyson's living room, so he pulled into the driveway and rang the bell. When he looked at the District Attorney, he thought the man had aged ten years. The dynamic vitality seemed to have left him as he led the way to the living room. He seemed to have been working hard at something. Papers were scattered all over a bridge table.

“What news, Justis?” Tennyson asked him when they were seated.

“Plenty,” said Reade. He recounted the events of the night, emphasizing his certainty that the so-called suicide had really been a cleverly arranged murder. But at its conclusion, Tennyson shook his head slowly.

“You’re indulging in wishful thinking, I fear. Not that I don’t appreciate it, Justis. But just how all this activity connects with Anatole, I don’t see. You have established no real connection between him and this mysterious Mr. Hartshorn—at least none that will stand up in court.”

“Then why was Ivy Thomas killed?” Reade asked.

“I don’t know,” said Tennyson. “And neither do you. Justis, you seemed to have stirred up some new mare’s nest in the town. But I’m not in it.” He gestured toward the papers on the table in front of him. “I’m preparing my resignation. I’m putting it on the air tomorrow—no, this afternoon at five.”

Reade argued with all of the forensic skill he could muster. But to no avail. When at last he gave up, he felt wrung and defeated. Tail between his legs, he drove back to his apartment house and let himself in. His guest was snoring peacefully in the guest bedroom and one of the whisky bottle was two thirds empty. Reade smiled faintly and turned in himself.

He awoke to the smell of coffee and bacon cooking. The electric clock beside his bed informed him it was past ten o’clock. Waking up in a hurry, he leaped out of bed and headed for the shower. Emerging, with a toweling robe around him, he found that Rorey Burke had prepared an excellent breakfast for two.

“You shouldn’t be bell hopping in a hotel,” Reade said after sampling the omelet. “You ought to be in back, cooking. Sleep all right?”

“Swell, thanks, boss. That’s some

mattress you’ve got. A read haymaker. You eat too fast.”

“Not usually,” said Reade, smiling at his guest’s impertinence. “Anybody try to get in here last night?”

“No, but the phone kept ringing. I didn’t answer.”

That, thought Reade, would have been Sanger. Well, he’d square it with the homicide lieutenant later. He finished his coffee, feeling like a new man, hurried into his clothes.

CHAPTER V

Reade’s Defiance

BACK at the Haymarket, he consulted the manager about Room Three-Ten. With perplexing results. Three-Ten, it appeared, had not been occupied at all. When Reade revealed something of his information about it, the manager scowled. Reade went back with him while he consulted the room service and the cook about meals. The result was a total blank. Nobody knew a thing. Or if anyone had such knowledge, he was not revealing it. Leaving the perplexed hotel official to work it out, Reade went out and drove back toward the hill. This time he went right on past Merle Tennyson’s estate to an even larger and more ornate residence a mile and a half further out. It was time he had a showdown with Blaine Fairman and Company.

They were eating a late breakfast-lunch when he entered. Fairman wore a dressing gown and slippers and Addy was clad in casual slacks and halter. Only Monty Weir was conventionally attired. His eyes were puffy as if he were suffering from a hangover.

“Welcome, enemy,” said Addy with a grin. She had a trace of egg on her otherwise perfect chin.

“Hello, foe,” said Reade amiably.

Then he turned to the girl's uncle, his face growing serious.

"Pardon my intrusion, Fairman, but I've got to have it out with you and time is short."

"Go right ahead," said the older man blandly, revealing no intention of leaving the table. "It's time a number of things were aired—in confidence, of course."

"Let's have it, Justis," said Weir. Affording him a glance of distaste, Reade pulled up a chair. He wished Addy weren't in on this, but after all the girl was over twenty-one. And time was of the essence.

"You must know by now," he said, deliberately using the shock treatment, "that I caught your man Dulac red-handed after he had killed Ivy Thomas last night."

"Just a moment," said Blaine Fairman, lifting his voice. "Dulac has talked with me. Naturally I would not reveal his whereabouts even if I knew it. But he told me he did not kill the girl."

"What's his explanation for his behavior?"

"He went to that dressing room to question Miss Thomas about a totally different affair—a private investigation in which he has been helping me—and found her dead. Then you walked in and tried to hang it on him."

"All right," said Reade. "So he hung one on me. But if he was innocent, why did he cut and run? Ballistics would prove he didn't do it."

"He didn't have time, Reade. As it was, he lost a valuable lead to a man we are searching for."

"I think I'm beginning to understand," said Reade softly. "I don't suppose you were hunting for Roy Murray. And I don't suppose you were out to have him captured by your man to show up Merle Tennyson."

"What do you think?" Monty Weir asked insultingly.

"Just a minute, Monty, I'll handle

this," said Fairman. "Put that way, it does sound a little crude. But politics, young man, is not a kid-glove game."

"That I understand," said Reade. "But such being the case, why did you and your gang allow mobsters like Murray to hide out in the City?"

"Sometimes," the older man said, "it is impossible to alter conditions too suddenly lest the whole political structure collapse. My predecessors inaugurated this policy you bring up. For years now, I have been seeking to change it, to clear the City of its bad name."

"Recent events certainly bear you out," said Reade with irony. Fairman permitted himself a faint smile.

"Permit me to remind you that recent events have occurred during the administration of which you are an integral part," he said.

"Politics again," said Weir. Addy looked at him, frowning a little.

"Only because the machine you built is still handling routine affairs," said Reade bitterly.

FAIRMAN lifted his eyebrows and nodded his head.

"You see now what I mean about moving gradually," said the boss. "That's the trouble with all reform groups. They try to do too much too fast—and everything gets out of hand. You don't suppose I'm against them in theory."

"I don't give a hang about your theory, Fairman," said Reade. "It's your practice I object to. Having your niece deliver the fake suicide note to Lou Anatole's killer is just an example."

"What do you mean, Reade?" said Fairman. The bluff good humor had dropped as if it were a flimsy garment. The City boss' tone was hard, dangerous.

"Oh, no!" gasped Addy, turning pale.

"You have no proof of that," roared

Fairman, pounding the table. "Because it's a filthy lie!"

"I have proof enough for me," said Reade. He paused to sniff. Yes, the same perfume that had surrounded the suicide note was now emanating from Addy. "And now that I know, I'll find proof enough for any court in the land."

"If I were a younger man," shouted Fairman, rising from the table, his immense pear face scarlet, "I'd throw you out of here myself."

"I was just going," said Reade. At the doorway, he turned to face Addy's shocked blue eyes. "Hereafter, I suggest you read some of the messages you deliver for your uncle, Addy. They might prove educational."

Reade drove toward town a little way, picked out the driveway of an abandoned house he had in mind, backed his car into it and lighted a cigarette. His thoughts were in turmoil. But he knew now that Addy had delivered that fatal message. She had told him her perfume was made up specially by Frangois. Which meant she undoubtedly used different scents for day and evening. Girls who could do such things.

That Fairman should use his niece for such unsavory errands had him boiling. Always before, while dead set against Fairman and all he stood for politically, he personally had entertained a sneaking liking for the old boss. Fairman had appeared to operate with a certain set of standards of his own. They might not have been of the highest, but at least he lived up to them. Now Fairman had revealed another side to his nature.

Reade wondered if Addy would be sent out again now that he had planted his dynamite. Men like Fairman disliked using the telephone—their own telephones at any rate—for such skulduggery.

If Addy were sent out once more, Reade intended to follow her. He decided to give himself an hour before going back to

town and tangling with Sanger.

It was thirty-five minutes later that Addy drove by in her smart little blue roadster. With a sudden this-is-it feeling, he slipped the convertible into gear and took off after her.

Evidently Addy had something on her mind, for she drove as if she were out to break records. While it meant Reade had to step to keep her in sight, it was also a factor in his favor. It implied she would pay little attention to whether or not she were being followed.

He stayed with her all the way into town. As she took turn after turn, a frown tightened Reade's features. Addy seemed to be heading toward a familiar destination. If she turned right at the next cross-street, it would mean she was going to his own apartment house.

She took the turn and pulled to a stop in front of the marquee. Utterly baffled, Reade braked to a stop in back of her in time to see her disappear through the front doors of the building. Hope and a stronger emotion welled up within him. She had taken his warning and was going to turn to him!

IT NEVER occurred to him that she might be visiting another apartment in the building. He skidded into the elevator beside her, just as the operator was closing the door.

"Addy!" he said. "You almost missed me."

"Justis!" she exclaimed, looking at him blankly.

"What are you doing—but of course, you live here."

He gaped at her. Then, as that disturbing perfume became evident in the confines of the cage, he snapped out of it.

But it didn't make sense.

"Then you weren't coming to see me?" he asked.

"Of course not," she replied, a trifle stiffly. "I'm doing one of those errands for

Blaine you were so absurd about this morning.”

“Mr. Hartshorn, I presume,” said Reade acidly. She colored, but made no reply. He stared at her and she stared fixedly straight ahead. The elevator operator had to call to them when they reached his floor.

“Seven, Miss,” he said. Reade, thoroughly angry, started to move out, bumped into her. She was getting off at the same floor. He apologized, allowed her to sweep past him.

Moving a trifle haughtily, she went on down the hall looking at the numbers on the apartment doors, finally paused in front of one—his own.

“Here,” he said. “Let me. And won’t you come in?”

“But it can’t be yours!” she almost wailed.

“But it is,” he replied. He opened the door, ushered her in, then blocked her passage. “Welcome to the domicile, Addy. And now—let me see that envelope you’re carrying.”

In her bewilderment, she acceded to his demand, put the square of folded and sealed white paper into his hand. He scowled at it, switched on the light. It was to Mr. Hartshorn, Apartment Seven-C, in the building—his own apartment.

“But this is insane!” he said.

“I know,” Addy murmured. She stared at him as he turned the envelope over.

“Maybe it’s a gag, Addy. There is no Mr. Hartshorn here.” He handed it back to her. “Open it.”

She ripped it apart, scanned the message. Her eyes narrowed, then looked at his, wide with fright.

“Read it, Justis,” she told him.

He did, feeling lost in Looking Glass Land. In a hasty scrawl was written:

Hartshorn:—

Take care of Reade. Make it look like the Anatole job if you can. Come what may, this should be the final rubout we need. And don’t go back to the job. Too many people are onto it. Use my place for a hideout until we can cool things on.

It was unsigned. Reade studied it, then led the way into his living room. He nodded to Rorey, who was sprawled out on the sofa, listening to a program of swing music on the radio. The bellhop scrambled to his feet respectfully when he saw Addy. Then as she smiled at him, he grinned back.

“Howdy, Miss Fairman,” he said.

Reade explained that he was holding Rorey under cover for his own protection until he had solved the identity of Mr. Hartshorn. He suggested a drink.

“Not only because I’ve been marked for the spot,” he told the girl, “but in honor of your first visit to my humble home.”

CHAPTER VI

Masks Off

PLAINLY Addy was sunk. She sat down heavily in one of the armchairs like a lady in a dream. When Reade put a glass of neat brandy in her hand, she gulped it quickly. Having her illusions about her uncle crash around her was knocking the props out from under her.

Reade downed a shot himself, glanced again at the note and scowled. There was something about that writing. And then the full import of it struck him. He went to Addy and helped her to her feet.

“I’ve got a conference coming up in just a few minutes,” he lied. “Addy, I’m sorry to make this so brief, but you’ll come back, won’t you?”

“Of course, if you want me,” said Addy. “You’ve always known that. Oh,

Justis!” She looked about ready to burst into tears. Reade tried to calm her, argued, and all but forced her from the apartment. But when she acceded to his pleading, the words he had been dreading and waiting for sounded behind him.

“*Uh-uh!* Miss Fairman stays.” Rorey Burke was standing in the middle of the carpet, holding the gun Reade had given him with practiced negligence. Reade winced, led the bewildered Addy back to the armchair.

“Very well, Mr. Hartshorn!” Reade said. “You seem to be in charge for the moment.”

“That’s right.” The young-old man grinned without mirth. “So you finally got wise to me. I knew it couldn’t last.”

“Your own buddy tipped me off,” said Reade, nodding toward the letter. “That’s what did it, Mr. Hartshorn—or should I say Roy Murray?”

“He’ll pay,” said the gunman in a matter-of-fact tone that was more chilling than any show of temper. “Once you got hep to the Hartshorn gag, the other was easy, huh?”

“Justis,” said Addy faintly. “Is that—”

“That’s Roy Murray,” Reade replied. “Yes, Murray, once the one cover-up broke, the other was easy. Smart gag, though—hiding out as a bellhop. What are you going to do?”

“Lam,” said Murray, “and tend to a little unfinished business. When I get orders to rub out an Assistant D.A., I know it’s time to beat it. Yes, I overheard you and Miss Fairman in the hall. Thanks for giving me time to get heeled.” He began to laugh silently.

“What’s so funny?” Reade inquired.

“Why, how it’s going to look when it comes out that I was held in protective custody by the Assistant D.A. himself. That is going to be a riot in the newspapers.”

Reade curdled. It would finish not only his career, but Merle Tennyson’s. It would undo all that he had accomplished to prove

Anatole’s death murder instead of suicide.

Yet he couldn’t blame himself too severely. Murray’s disguise as a bellhop was inspired. No one expects a criminal on the lam to take a menial job. And this particular job was one which had kept him in the very heart of the City’s activity—with his finger on its pulse. But he and inevitably Tennyson were due to be tarred with the same brush. He began to wonder about his chances of joining his superior on his resignation broadcast this afternoon.

“Are you going to—kill us?” Addy asked.

“Nope.” Murray shook his head and smiled secretively. “Contrary to the views of some of our most prominent criminal psychiatrists—I got the word right, didn’t I, Reade?—I am not crazy. This looked like a good racket here, but you, Reade, have blown it sky-high overnight. I owe you a little something for that.”

He paused, ran a hand across his mouth, chuckled.

“I’m going to leave you two tied up here and send in a little tip to the police. Your being tied up after keeping me in your home as a guest, will look sour enough, Reade, but to have the boss’ niece here with you, should really tie things up in this town.”

READE suppressed an oath with difficulty. He wished he could think of some way out of it, but experience during the Pacific War had taught him the painful futility of trying to rush a loaded gun in the hands of a competent gunman. He tried to meet Addy’s hopeless gaze cheerfully. It was an impossible, an ignominious situation.

“Just in case something like this comes up,” said Murray, “I bring my own tools along with me.” He pulled four rolls of two-inch-wide adhesive tape out of his jacket pockets, laid them on a table beside the couch.

“Lie down, Reade, on the sofa. That’s

it. Take off your coat. You try anything and I plug Miss Fairman.”

There was no doubt about his meaning it. His eyes were as cold as frozen marbles. There was going to be just one opportunity, when Murray began to wind the tape. But the gunman was ahead of him. Once Reade was lying flat, he stood back and beckoned the girl over with his gun.

“Wind that tape around his upper arms,” Murray said. “And make it binding.”

But at that instant there came a sound of shattering glass from the bedroom. Murray whirled like a cat. Reade flung himself from the sofa and grabbed the gunman from behind. As Murray tore himself free, Reade plunged at the gunman’s legs in a perfect clip from behind that would have brought an automatic fifteen-yard penalty on a football field. This game was for higher stakes.

With his knee he also lashed out hard, sending Addy sprawling flat, but in no way detracting from the vital direction of his block. Murray let out a sound that was a cross between a grunt and a yelp. Then he fell forward and banged his head against the table containing the rolls of tape. When he hit the carpet he was out cold.

Scrambling to his feet, Reade snatched up his pistol from where it had fallen, gave Murray a thoughtful kick on the left temple with the point of his shoe, then swung to face his bedroom door.

Frenchy Dulac had rushed through, and skidded to an abrupt stop as he saw the tableau in the living room. He grinned with relief when Addy got up, slowly, rubbing her hip.

“You all right, Miss Addy?” the gorilla asked, ignoring the gun Reade was pointing at him. When she nodded and essayed a tremulous smile, he relaxed, dropped his own revolver to his side and came over to gaze at the unconscious gunman.

“You got him, Mr. Reade? Nice

going.”

“Thanks to you,” said Reade. “He was about to tape us up when you came smashing through that window and diverted his attention.” He stuck out his hand. “Forget about last night. Okay?”

“Okay,” said the Canadian, grinning sheepishly. “Say I thought you was this fellow—” with a glance at the unconscious Murray “—when I jumped you in that North Trent Street Hallway.”

“So that was you?”

“Sure. I’ve been on that guy’s tail since he knocked Ivy Thomas off. I got a glimpse of him running out as I came backstage. I recognized him. That’s why I didn’t have time to explain then and had to bust you.”

“It’s all right,” said Reade. “How are you, Addy? I didn’t mean to hurt you, but there were too many guns loose to take chances with you upright.”

“I know you meant well,” said the girl witheringly. Then she grinned. A thundering knock sounded on the door.

It was Blaine Fairman and Clint Sanger. Reade waved them inside and gave a brief resume of the situation.

When the police had taken Murray away, and Reade, the Fairmans and Dulac were alone, Reade poured a drink for his guests. That done, he picked up the note which Addy had brought and showed it to the politician.

“Ever see this before, Fairman?” he asked.

“Never, and you’ve seen my signature enough to know it,” Fairman retorted.

“That’s what tipped me off,” he said. “I gather you’ve taken care of the situation at your end.”

A SLOW smile spread over Fairman’s face.

“I have. You got me thinking, young man, once I recovered my temper this

morning. I took on young Weir because he seemed a bright chap and for—well, in considerations of some favors his father had done the party. It seems I certainly took on more than I ever bargained for.”

“It was Weir who actually gave you those messages, wasn’t it, Addy?” Reade asked.

She nodded.

“As I get it, Weir figured the reform win was just what he needed to take control of the old gang you’ve been running,” said Reade. “He was in an ideal spot, of course.”

“Clever devil—too clever for anybody’s good. I got Sanger up at the house a while ago and we broke him down. Oh, it wasn’t hard once I knew what he was up to. But if he had managed to discredit both Tennyson and myself, he would have been hard to dislodge. When I think of some of the things he has been doing in my name—well, I haven’t always played clean, Reade, but some things are too much.”

“Blaine,” said Reade, “that’s one of the things that has had me baffled. I couldn’t believe you were behind a lot of what’s been going on—the sluggings, clippings and yes, the killings. I suppose young Weir picked up his knack for forgery during his bad check

era.”

“It will be hard on his father,” said the old man, sighing. “But when I think of how he was using Addy here, I hope he draws the chair. He’s earned it.”

“I’d like to ask you a question, Blaine,” said Reade. “Drawing on your vast political experience, do you think it would be bad policy for me to take the niece of the opposition leader out for the biggest and best wine-dine-and-dance evening I can put together in this town—and make a habit of it?”

“Unorthodoxy,” said the old man, his eyes twinkling, “is said to be a hallmark of genius. Go to it, son.”

“Don’t I have a thing to say?” Addy asked, and she looked anything but displeased.

“Not a thing,” said Reade. He glanced at his watch, whooped. “Oh, my gosh! Merle goes on the air in less than an hour to resign his post. I’ll have to write him a whole new speech. He’s slower than a mud-turtle himself.”

He raced for the door, skidded to a halt, called back.

“Keep her here, Blaine, and help yourself to whatever you want. I’ll be back in time to take her out.”