

Lew Kelch swung at him
with Jilley's gun



NEW YEAR'S TRAP

By JOHNSTON McCULLY

A flickering candle means death to Police Sergeant Jim Jilley when a stir-crazy killer seeks grim vengeance!

AT ten in the morning on New Year's Day, the city seemed to be half deserted. Only a few persons were on the streets in the district where police patrol car No. 132 was rolling along slowly. Patrolman Frank Harlan was driving and Sergeant Jim Jilley sprawled on the seat beside him with an ear open for any radio message meant for them.

There was a litter of confetti, scrap

paper, discarded paper caps and horns in the gutters, for the street cleaning department had not been able to function during the night. Except for corner drug stores, restaurants and tobacco shops, business establishments were closed for the day.

"It's worse'n Sunday," Harlan remarked. "Everybody must be sleeping it off. Wild time last night."

“Plenty of headaches this morning,” Sergeant Jilley replied. “It was a big night. Maybe we’ll have an easy time of it today.”

The radio opened up, but none of the messages concerned Car No. 132. There was nothing but the usual “man down” calls, and lost children and noisy radios in some spots where celebrations were still in progress. The car drifted on slowly along the almost-deserted street.

“Lew Kelch was released from the Big House a few days ago, wasn’t he?” Harlan asked.

Jilley yawned. “Yeah, that’s right. Last Friday, I think.”

“And you’re not worryin’ any about it?”

“Not any,” said Jilley.

“When he was sent up, he made his threats—remember?”

“Oh, sure, I remember. He threatened in open court that he’d kill me as soon as he got out. But that’s nothing. Hundreds of men, when they’re sentenced, threaten to ‘get’ the copper who testified, or the judge, or all the jury. But they soon forget it in the Big House. I happened to stumble into that case. Was a patrolman then. It was my testimony that backed up that of two Headquarters men and convinced the jury.”

“Yeah, I know a lot of ‘em forget it in the Big House, but this Lew Ketch is mean. He’s the kind that remembers.”

“He was watched when he was released four days ago,” Jilley explained. “Had friends waiting to meet him. He stayed in the city a day and then took a train for Nebraska, where he has a brother. Told everybody he was going there and keep straight and stay out of trouble. He served only three years and a half—got time off for good behavior—but that was long enough to make him sick of prison life, I suppose.”

“Nebraska, huh?”

“Yeah. Omaha. Headquarters dicks watched him until he left. He bought a ticket, and some of his old friends saw him off. He’s nothing in my hair.”

Harlan swung the car around a corner and into a narrow side street and pulled up in front of a small restaurant.

“You go get your coffee first, Jim,” he told Jilley.

This was the usual thing. They stopped every morning in front of this friendly little restaurant, and one at a time got coffee while the other remained in the car and listened to the police radio.

JILLEY yawned again and got out of the car. He strolled into the restaurant, and Harlan, watching through the window, saw him served with coffee and doughnuts. Harlan listened to the radio broadcast. It was slow and lazy this morning. The radio sergeants weren’t snappy and betraying tension, as they did when anything exciting was happening. Only routine stuff.

Jilley returned to the car, and Harlan went in and had his coffee and a slab of apple pie. He came out picking his teeth and got behind the wheel and prepared to drive out from the curb to continue the uninteresting patrol. Then their call came:

“Calling Car No. one-thirty-two! Car one-three-two! Go to six-ten Marston Street, apartment two-oh-six, see the woman! Call the ambulance if needed! Check!”

Jilley flipped a switch and answered: “One-three-two—check!”

Harlan got the car moving. The address was several blocks down the side street in a poorer section of the city, where there was a long stretch of old ramshackle buildings with cheap shops on the ground floors and cheap apartments and furnished rooms above.

"Wonder what we're runnin' into now?" Harlan said, as he bent over the wheel and watched street intersections while Jilley gave blasts of the warning siren and turned on the red light.

"Ambulance if needed," Jilley repeated. "Might be a hangover fight, family row or only somebody sick. Anything's liable to happen down this way. That's one thing I like about this job—you never know what you're going to run into."

"Two blocks more," Harlan said.

He slowed down and took a corner, swerved half way across the street and brought the car to a stop in front of No. 610 Marston Street.

There was no evidence of anything wrong. No excitement was apparent. A few persons were walking up and down the street and a few kids were standing on the next corner as if trying to decide what to do with the New Year's holiday.

"Wait," Sergeant Jilley said.

"Don't you want me to go along, Jim?"

"Call you if I need you. Watch the radio. This may not be much of anything."

Jilley went up the steps and entered the lower floor of the three-story building. He found a dirty hall with a ragged carpet, and a ragged runner on the rickety stairs. A slatternly woman of uncertain age, plainly inebriated, opened a door and stepped into the musty hall.

"I'm the landlady here. What's the trouble?" she demanded.

"Where's two hundred and six?" Jilley countered.

"Upstairs and to the right. What's the trouble?"

"You know as much or more about it than I do," Jilley told her. "Got a call to come here. Somebody sick, maybe."

"They're nice, quiet folks name of Smith," the woman declared. "Never give

me any trouble. Man and his wife."

"There are a lot of folks in this part of town who call themselves Smith," Jilley said, as he started up the stairs and flinched when the treads creaked beneath his shoes.

He saw the woman turn back into her room and close the door. Jilley went on up the stairs and found Apartment 206. There was no bell button, so he knocked.

A woman opened the door. She was a small woman with faded blond hair, and her face looked as if she had been crying. She stepped to one side and indicated that Jilley was to enter.

Alert and on guard, he stepped into the room. It was furnished poorly, he saw at the first rapid glance. The curtains at the windows were tattered and dirty. There was another ragged carpet. A table and a few chairs were scattered about, and there was an old couch with holes in the upholstery with the stuffing coming out.

The only decent thing in the room was a radio on the table. It looked to be a new instrument, and Jilley saw at a glance that it was a good one, with short wave and police reception bands as well as one for general broadcasts.

Nobody but the woman was in the room. There were two closed doors, besides the one through which he had entered, and which the woman had closed.

"Who are you?" Jilley asked, as he got out his notebook and pencil.

"I'm Mrs. Mamie Larker. "I—I didn't mean to do it!" She began crying again. "But he was going to beat me! I had to do something. He's big and strong and—"

"Your husband?" Jilley asked. "Where is he?"

She pointed to one of the closed doors. "There—in the bedroom. He fell across the bed, then I phoned for the cops. I didn't mean to do it—but I had to do somethin'. He might have killed me."

“Family scrap, huh?” Jilley asked, as he started for the door she had indicated. “Too much New Year’s Eve celebration, maybe.”

“Yeah, that’s it,” she confessed. “He kept on drinkin’ all night. I couldn’t stop him. Then he started quarrelin’ about somethin’—”

Jilley turned the door knob and threw the door back to open it wide. The bedroom was small and rather dark without a light burning. A bed and a couple of rickety chairs beside it, a dresser with the drawers half open and their contents spilling out gave a picture of squalor. A man was stretched across the bed, face downward.

JILLEY glanced around the room swiftly, and saw nobody else. He marched across to the bed. The covers had been thrown back and almost off the bed, and there was splotches of red on the sheet which looked like blood. The back of the man’s head was red, too, and his hair seemed matted with blood. A broken bottle was on the floor beside the bed.

Same old stuff, Jilley thought. Too much to drink—he gets quarrelsome and starts for her—she crowns him with a bottle.

He bent over the man on the bed and touched him, and the man groaned. Not dead, then. Jilley gripped him by the shoulder and started to turn him over.

The man on the bed suddenly came to life. He whirled over and tossed up two big hands which gripped Jilley’s arms close to the shoulders, and jerked Jilley forward and off his feet.

Two other men rushed into the bedroom, and the woman closed the door quickly behind them. Before Jilley could fight his way free from the grip of the man on the bed and get out his service pistol, they had him. He was held as if in a vise.

His pistol was jerked out of its scabbard. His arms were jerked behind his back and lashed quickly while he squirmed and tried to fight.

He tried to yell for Harlan, for help. Something cracked against the side of his head and nearly knocked him unconscious, and before he could prevent it a rag had been stuffed into his mouth and a strip of cloth bound around his head to hold the gag in place.

One of the men tied his ankles together while the other two held him. They picked him up and slammed him down into a chair against the wall, and lashed him to it so he scarcely could move. He shook his head to clear it, and was all right except for a dull ache where he had been smashed.

“That does it,” one of the men told the others and the woman. “Worked just as we figured.” He motioned to the woman. “Get into the front room, Mamie. This copper’s pal may come up to see what’s delayin’ him. Sing out if he does, and we’ll be ready to handle him.”

Jilley saw the woman leave the room and close the door behind her. One of the three men came up and stood before him, grasped his chin and held up his head, and was quite rough about it.

“Know me, copper?” he asked. “Do you recognize me, Jilley? Or has a stretch in stir changed my appearance?”

Jilley knew him—Lew Kelch. Here was the man who had threatened to “get him” as soon as he was released from prison. He was supposed to be on his way to Nebraska. And here he was, with friends, and Jilley didn’t need anybody to tell him that he was caught in a trap.

“I can tell by your face that you recognize me, all right,” Lew Kelch continued. “Remember what I said when the judge sentenced me? I said I’d get you when I got out, and that’s just what I’m

goin' to do. I pretended to go to Nebraska. Bought a ticket and some pals saw me off. But I left I the train the next mornin' and doubled back. You see, Jilley, I had my plans all made. Had plenty of time to make 'em, stretched on a bunk nights in the Big House."

Jilley couldn't speak because of the gag, and could he have spoken he probably would have said nothing at that juncture. He was wondering if Harlan would leave the car and come in when he didn't appear, and whether Harlan could do something about the situation or would become a victim also.

"We learned all about you," Lew Kelch went on to say. "Learned you were in a prowl car now, and a sergeant, found your district, and rented this place. Got a good radio so we could listen to police calls. We watched—or rather my pals did, for I kept out of sight. When we learned that you were on duty this mornin', we decided to spring it.

"Pretty good stunt, huh? We had my pal's wife phone Headquarters when we knew you were in the neighborhood. She told 'em her husband had been badly hurt in a fight. You answered the call, and we were ready for you. Everything looked natural, huh? Looked like a family brawl, huh? Red ink on the sheet and on my head. You walked right into the trap, copper—the last trap you'll ever walk into!"

He bent closer, and his eyes were blazing. His hands had become fists, but he did not strike Jilley.

"You gave the testimony that sent me to the Big House," Lew Kelch accused. "The jury was uncertain till you shot off your mouth. I swore I'd get you for that, and I'm goin' to. Then I'll get out of town and go on to Nebraska, where I started, and live with my brother—and laugh at what happened to you!"

Jilley's eyes were glittering, and he

gurgled and moaned behind the filthy rag that gagged him.

"Want to talk, do you?" Kelch asked. "All right, we'll take off the gag for a few minutes. And I'm holdin' your police special, see? And if you raise your voice to let out a yell, I'll smash you on the head with it and put you out. I'll pistol-whip you till your face will be a mess. Then you won't even know what happens to you till you wake up in hell."

Kelch gestured, and one of the other men untied the rag and took the gag from Jilley's mouth. He worked his jaws a moment and gulped, then spoke.

"Don't be a fool, Kelch," he said. "You've paid your debt, and you're in the clear now, except for this assault on me. If you kill me, they'll get you for it, and you'll do the hot squat. If you manhandle me and don't kill me, the Department will get you if it takes twenty years."

Lew Kelch laughed a little. "We're goin' to kill you," he replied. "And you'll suffer some before you die. I've planned the whole thing, copper. It'll never be traced to me or any of my friends. Nobody knows who sent for the cops. Nobody here but the landlady knows any of us. We'll be gone when it happens, and you'll be here all by your little lonesome, watchin' death come, waitin' for it, sufferin'—"

"There's always a flaw in the best crooked plan," Jilley told him.

HE WAS playing for time. If he didn't show up, Harlan would come looking for him, especially if there was another call for Car No. 132. And Harlan might be suspicious of the setup and do something about it. Harlan was a cautious man.

They heard a knock on the outside door—an imperative knock of the sort Harlan would give. Lew Kelch gestured again, and the other two grabbed Jilley's head and pried his mouth open and affixed

the foul gag again before he could do more than make a little squawk.

He tugged at his bonds, and Kelch chuckled, then motioned for everybody to be still. They could hear what happened in the other room.

“Yes, officer?” the woman was asking.

“Did the sergeant come up here?”

“Sergeant?”

“You know who I mean—police sergeant. We got a call from this apartment. Where’s the sergeant?”

“Oh! I didn’t know what you meant at first. If you’d said ‘policeman’ I’d have understood. We—we’ve had a little trouble—my husband and I. I had to hit him with a bottle. I called the police and told them to send somebody—”

“Where’s the sergeant?” Harlan barked at her.

“He’s in the bedroom talking to my husband and trying to straighten things out. I hope he doesn’t arrest him. He’ll quiet down and be all right—”

Those in the bedroom heard the heavy tread of Harlan as he crossed the room to the door. Bound in the chair and gagged, Jilley was unable to give a warning. He tried to groan and moan, but the sounds could not have been heard a dozen feet away.

The door was thrown open, and Harlan stood framed in it. By turning his head slightly, Jilley could see him. He saw Jilley, too, knew something was wrong, and as he turned he made a try to get his gun from its holster.

Lew Kelch swung at him with Jilley’s gun and knocked Harlan backward. One of the other men rushed in and used a blackjack. Harlan crumpled to the floor.

“Tie him up and gag him, like you did the other,” Kelch ordered. “Too bad for him that he came walkin’ in here as he did. He’ll have to go with the other now.”

One of the men brought a pail of water

from the bathroom after Harlan had his wrists and ankles tied, and tossed the water into his face. He moaned, gasped, opened his eyes.

“Lash him in that other chair,” Lew Kelch ordered, “and gag him.”

Before Harlan fully realized what was occurring, they had him lashed to the chair and the chair in turn lashed to the foot of the bed. The chair in which Jilley was sitting plainly enough had been prepared beforehand, for it was fastened to the floor in some manner, out about three feet from the wall.

Harlan was gagged. He exchanged looks with Jilley, and frowned, but that was all the communication they had. Lew Kelch stood in front of Harlan and looked down at him.

“I’m sorry you walked in on this, copper,” Kelch said. “Got nothin’ against you. Jilley is the one I’m after. But now you’re in the same boat with him. I’m Lew Kelch, in case you don’t know. I’ve got a little score to settle with your sergeant. Maybe you understand what it is, huh?”

Harlan nodded that he did. Kelch turned to his pals.

“Go down and get that prowl car away from here,” he directed one of them. “Get the keys out of the copper’s pocket. Watch your chance and drive the car a few blocks away and ditch it, then keep right on goin’.” He faced the other man. “You and your wife clear out now—use the back stairs and go through the alley. You know where to go. I’ll meet you there soon as I ‘tend to everything here. Get goin’!”

“Sure you can handle it alone, Lew?” one of the others asked.

“Yeah. And I want to handle it alone. This is my job, and it’ll sure be a pleasure.” They slipped out of the room and Kelch closed the door behind them. He went into the bathroom and came out and closed the door there, too, and put a

strip of carpet in the crack at the bottom of the door and stuffed it in tightly. Then he faced his prisoners again.

"The doors and windows are sealed airtight," he explained. "When I leave, I'll seal the door to the front room. And the gas will be turned on in here. It'll spread over the floor and gradually lift until it fills the room up to your noses and mouths. But you won't die that easy. You won't just suffocate from the gas. You'll be blown to bits."

Jilley and Harlan watched him as he made his arrangements. Kelch seemed to be mad. "Stir madness," Jilley thought. It got many of them, a disease contracted in an atmosphere of desperation when men were confined behind bars.

THERE was a big gas heater in the room, and Lew Kelch laughed as he turned it on full blast. Then, in the center of the room, he placed a stool and on the stool a saucer in which a candle had been fastened. He lit the candle, and laughed again, leering at the two bound and gagged policemen.

"You'll notice that the candle is a few inches lower than your heads," Lew Kelch said. "The gas will fill the room, gradually come up. When the flame of the candle touches it—boom! There'll be an explosion that'll tear down the house, and there'll be a ragin' fire. You'll go to Hades in that blast, Jilley, and your pal with you. Now, you can sit there and sweat in terror, sniffin' at the mountin' gas, wonderin' what second it'll touch the flame of the candle and blow you to blazes."

The odor of escaping gas was strong in the room already. Lew Kelch coughed a little and retreated to the door of the front room.

"Just sit there helpless and think about it," he told them. "I'll seal this door on the other side, go out the front and lock up, go

out the back way and be quite a distance from here when the explosion comes. They'll find two charred bodies—maybe more if the folks downstairs don't get out in a hurry. I said I'd get you, Jilley, and I'm doin' it. And I'll live and laugh about what happened to you."

Jilley gurgled behind the gag. Kelch laughed and shook his head.

"No, I don't take the gag off again," he said. "You haven't got anything to say that I want to listen to. I'll be on my way now. I'm goin' to have a drink with the others at Scotty's place, and then we'll scatter. I'll really go to Nebraska this time. And the others will do a little travelin', too. Goodby, coppers!"

He went into the front room and closed the door, and they heard the key turned in the lock. They also could hear Kelch working at the bottom of the door, stuffing a piece of carpet beneath it, sealing in the flowing gas. They heard him laugh again, and then a door slammed, and they knew he had gone.

He had turned on the radio in the front room before leaving, and it blared forth a program of music. Jilley and Harlan both tugged at their bonds, but failed to loosen them. They could only look at each other and frown. The chair in which Jilley sat, fastened to the floor beforehand, could not be moved. If any move was made, Harlan would have to make it.

Harlan's ankles were lashed together and to the chair, but his feet were planted on the floor. He tried to pull himself forward, and the chair moved a little, the bed moving along with it. It was an ordinary double bed, not so very heavy.

Harlan jerked again and tried to jump the chair. He moved the chair and bed a couple of inches. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. He looked at Jilley, and the latter nodded his head slightly, in the direction of the candle.

Harlan bobbed his head to indicate he understood. He worked frantically, now, jerking at the bed, while the clothesline with which he had been bound cut into his arms and legs and body. Inch by inch, he jerked chair and bed away from the wall and toward the stool in the center of the room, upon which the candle was burning on the saucer.

There was danger in the move, for jerking the chair and bed rocked the stool a little. If the candle was jarred off the saucer, or the saucer fell with it, the gas which already had escaped would be ignited, and there might be an explosion and fire which would mean the end of two radio car policemen.

Jilley continued tugging at the ropes which bound him, but could accomplish nothing. The filthy gag was choking him, and he could smell the foul odor of the escaping gas. He watched as Harlan jerked the chair and bed inch by inch toward the stool upon which the candle burned like a constant threat.

In the front room, the radio blared as a news commentator began his morning recital of events. Jilley began straining at the chair, trying to jerk it upward, but it had been fastened securely to the floor. Those who had arranged the trap had not expected to handle two men in that manner, so fastening Harlan's chair to the end of the bed was their best expedient.

A sudden thought came to Jilley—what could Harlan do if he could get close to the stool? The burning candle was a little lower than his head, but he was gagged effectually and could not blow out the tiny threatening flame.

He gurgled behind his gag, but Harlan gave him no attention. He was still jerking chair and bed an inch at a time toward the center of the room. Jilley began stomping his feet on the floor, hoping to attract the attention of somebody on the floor below,

but he stopped that instantly. It was a dangerous thing to do in this old, ramshackle building. Stomping shook the floor and made the stool dance. Jilley stopped it.

Harlan worked on. The perspiration was streaming from his face. He groaned at times because the ropes were hurting his arms and chest and legs. The tattered rug rolled up in front of the sliding bed and made it a little easier. Harlan kept on, and finally was within a foot of stool and candle.

JILLEY watched him closely now. Gagged, Harlan could not blow out the candle. He dared not knock it over with his head, for it might fall toward the floor and ignite the gas and cause an explosion and fire. Then, Jilley saw that Harlan had thought of and was attempting the only thing possible—he was trying to extinguish the candle by expelling breath through his nostrils.

The tiny flame wavered, but burned again. Harlan drew in air until he could hold no more, and blew steadily through his nostrils—and the candle went out.

But that did not end the danger. There would be no explosion now to wreck the building. But the room was filling with gas rapidly, and the two would be asphyxiated.

Jilley looked wildly around the room while Harlan, his eyes closed, rested for a moment after his effort. A few feet from Harlan was a dresser and beside it a chair. On the chair Jilley could see a shaving mug and brush and safety razor. One of the men had shaved, evidently, in front of the mirror over the dresser, and had not been tidy enough to put away his shaving things.

Behind his gag, Jilley gurgled and moaned and finally managed to attract Harlan's attention. All he could do, after Harlan turned his head to regard him, was

nod his own head a little toward the chair. Harlan looked that way, looked back and frowned. Jilley nodded his head again. Harlan turned to look in that direction a second time—and saw the razor.

The stool went over with a crash as Harlan began inching chair and bed again. The gas was getting heavier in the room, and to Jilley came the thought that this might be the end, that they could not accomplish their own rescue in time. He watched Harlan work, heard him moan as the ropes cut into him. But the chair and bed moved on toward the chair beside the dresser.

Harlan came finally to where he could touch the chair with his knees. He jerked the chair to which he was bound sideways, twisted in the ropes and put out his hands from behind his back. He tugged at the ropes until they gave as much as possible.

Jilley was scarcely breathing as he watched. Finally, he saw Harlan's fingers touch the end of the razor handle. Slowly, carefully, he drew it toward him until his fingers grasped it firmly.

He settled back in his chair, then, and fumbled with the razor. Jilley saw he was getting the blade out of the holder, and his constant fear was that Harlan would drop the blade. The handle fell to the floor. Harlan's fingers were continually busy. Part of the holder fell to the floor, and then the second part of it, and Harlan had the thin sharp blade in his fingers.

Jilley watched as he gripped the blade between thumb and forefinger and began sawing at one of the ropes which bound his wrists. It seemed an age to Jilley before the strand of rope parted. Harlan began sawing at another strand.

Behind the gag, Jilley was commencing to cough and choke. The foul odor of the gas was in his nostrils stronger than before. He realized that the gas was getting heavy, that soon it would

overcome them both.

He glanced at Harlan again. Harlan had his hands free. He tore the gag off and gulped, and began sawing at one of the ropes which held his ankles together.

"We'll make it, Jim," his coarse voice called to Jilley. "I could yell for help, but they'd get here too late. Probably nobody would pay any attention, anyhow. In this part of town a yell or two doesn't cause much worry."

He was sawing at the ropes as he talked. His ankles were freed, and then he slashed at the ropes which bound him to the chair. Jilley could see that blood was covering his hands, and knew he had cut himself badly.

"Got it!" he yelled, and stumbled away from the chair.

HARLAN went to the heater first, held his nose with one hand and bent down and turned off the gas. He picked up the chair and staggered to the nearest window and smashed it. Then he lurched back to Jilley and began cutting the ropes which held him.

He stopped after he had cut the ropes which held Jilley's ankles, and tore off Jilley's gag. Then he began cutting ropes again.

"Quick as you can, Frank," Jilley told him. "We've got to go after 'em. They'll be at Scotty's, so Kelch said."

"They took our guns—"

"Don't forget the extras we always carry in the car compartment—if we can find the car. And I'll phone in an alarm."

The ropes came free. The door to the living room was locked, but they smashed against it and tore it from its hinges. They rushed through the living room and had to smash the hall door, too. As they stumbled down the stairs, the frowsy landlady appeared.

"What's all that smashin'?" she

demanded. "You got no right to destroy property."

"Listen to me!" Jilley snapped at her. "Your tenants tried to kill us. Turned on the gas and left, and expected to blow your house up. They sneaked out the back way. Did you see a man drive away our car?"

"Wondered about that," she said. "Yeah, one of 'em came down and got into the police car and drove down the street that way." She pointed.

Jilley and Harlan rushed out of the building and down the steps to the walk, gulping the fresh air. Only a few persons were on the street. They sprinted to the first corner and saw their car parked about two blocks away. With the best speed they could make, they ran to the car and tumbled into it. The car a thief had left Harlan's keys in the ignition lock.

Jilley grabbed the radio and got contact. Talking swiftly, he gave a report of what had happened. Harlan had unlocked the compartment, which the car thief had not touched, probably in his haste to get away from the police car before somebody spotted him. The two extra guns were there. Harlan took one and handed Jilley the other as he broke off radio communication with the station.

"You know that dive they call Scotty's cafe," Jilley said. "Get into the alley behind it. We won't use the siren."

HARLAN got the car moving. Jilley was listening to the radio. He heard the general alarm:

"Attention all cars in District Number Six . . . All cars in District Number Six . . . General alarm! . . . Get to Scotty's cafe . . . officers in trouble . . . need help . . . use caution! Caution! All cars in District Number Six."

It was several blocks to the cafe, and Jilley was wondering if Lew Kelch and his friends would be there. It was possible, he

knew, that Kelch would want to remain in the neighborhood until the explosion came, and gloat over the destruction of Sergeant Jilley.

Harlan piloted the car to the mouth of the alley and turned into it slowly. The district was quiet, whereas the night before it had been a place of riotous noise. At the rear door of the cafe, Harlan stopped the car, and they got out.

"Take it easy," Jilley whispered. "Have your gun ready. They won't be expecting to see us, if they're here, and may go into action quick in a panic. You saw all of 'em, same as I did. Lew Kelch, the two men and the woman. We'll have help in a few minutes."

The rear door of the cafe, which was also a service entrance, was not locked. Jilley opened it, and they stepped into a little rear hall. They could hear subdued voices in the big front room, and somebody was singing in the kitchen as pots and pans clattered.

At the end of the hall, heavy curtains shielded the entrance to the main room, which had a long bar along one side, and booths and tables along the other. Jilley pulled the curtain aside and looked into the semi-dark room.

One man was behind the bar, and a couple of men were standing in front of it with drinks before them, talking. Jilley could see a man and woman in one of the booths. In another booth, about half way down the room, was a party. They were talking and laughing, and Jilley recognized Lew Kelch's voice.

"They're still here," he whispered to Harlan. "About the middle of the room in a booth on the right. Got your gun ready? Let's go!"

They had the sun out of their eyes now, and could see everything in the cafe clearly. Entering quietly, they walked down the line of booths. The man behind

the bar glanced at them and straightened a little, but made no effort to signal those in the booth when he saw Harlan looking directly at him.

Harlan walked a pace behind Jilley and to his left. Just before they came to the booth where Lew Kelch was sitting with the others, sirens sounded down the street. Jilley saw Kelch spring to his feet as he said something to the others.

"Steady! You're all under arrest!" Jilley snapped, as Harlan stepped up beside him. Both held their guns ready.

Kelch's eyes bulged as the others in the booth got quickly to their feet.

"Jilley!" Kelch roared.

"Your little trap didn't work, Kelch."

One of the other men yanked out a gun and shot. The slug passed between Jilley and Harlan and flew across the room to crash into a mirror. Lew Kelch cursed and yanked out a gun also.

Jilley shot him through the shoulder, and Kelch reeled back against the wall, still trying to lift his gun and get in a shot. The woman had dropped to the floor beneath the table, screaming. The third man made a dive in an effort to get away. Harlan pistol-whipped him and stretched him on the floor.

Jilley sprang aside as Kelch managed to fire again. The bullet flew wild. Jilley jumped forward and knocked Kelch's arm aside, struck him on the head with the side of his gun, tore Kelch's gun from his grasp and kicked it away.

Harlan had snapped handcuffs on the man who had tried to get away. Jilley used his on Lew Kelch. The third man, who had fired the first shot, was standing back against the wall with his hands held high, and he had dropped his gun upon the table. The woman was still on the floor screaming.

More sirens sounded out in the street, and tires squealed as cars made quick stops. Policemen came charging into the place with weapons held ready.

"Take 'em all in," Jilley said, waving weakly at the four. "One needs a trip to the emergency hospital."

He felt suddenly weak, and reeled away a few feet to be seized by the precinct captain, who had come in one of the cars. Jilley gave him the whole story in jerky sentences.

"Good boy!" the captain praised. "I'll have to do something for Harlan. He's a cool man in an emergency."

"None better," Jilley said.

"I'll turn over your car to another crew, Jilley. You and Harlan take the rest of the day off and get your nerves back to normal. We'll handle these four, and we won't handle 'em with kid gloves, either. I can imagine how you felt, sniffin' that gas and watchin' the candle and expectin' that in a few minutes— Oh, heck! That's police business. Get out of here and go home, you and Harlan. And—Happy New Year."

Jilley grinned. "Happy New Year to you, Captain," he said.