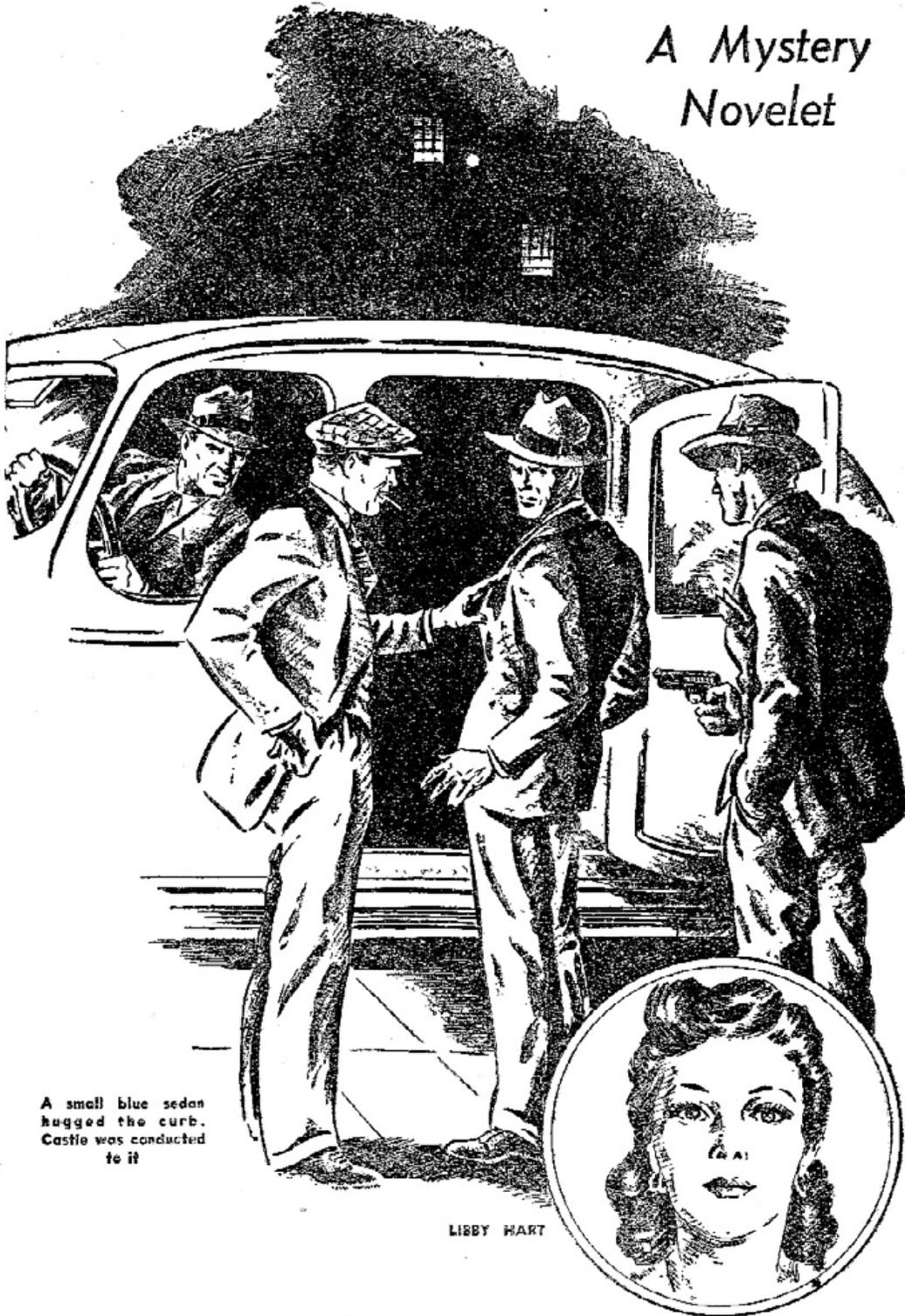


# A Mystery Novelet



A small blue sedan  
hugged the curb.  
Castle was conducted  
to it

LIBBY HART

# Slight Touch of Satan

By C. S. MONTANYE

*Sports writer Johnny Castle tries to protect famous ex-jockey Eddie Ring—and steps right into a diabolical murder maze of race-track bookies, criminal syndicates and notorious gangsters!*

## CHAPTER I

### TRIGGER MORTIS

THE semi-final came up after the main fracas—to make the exiting easier. But most of the cash customers, bored by the time the main bout concluded, began filtering out.

“Cauliflower Acres,” or the “Land of Dreams,” as I sometimes referred to Madison Square Garden in the sonnets I wrote for the *Orbit*, had a gallery of around twelve thousand that night. Which made the gate approximately forty grand.

I left the press department and shoved along with the others bound for the cool night air.

The star go hadn't been much. A couple of second-rate welters had traded leather without a knockdown. There had been a minimum of gore. Which, of course, hadn't set well with the fans who liked eyes gouged out and faces torn apart.

There was grumbling all around me.

I issued out on Eighth Avenue, still hemmed in by the mob, and thinking about Harvey's Chop House around the corner, when a hand came up and grabbed my arm.

“Mr. Castle! Just a minute—”

The party who put on the stop didn't scale an inch over five feet in his nude feet. If he weighed a hundred and ten pounds, dripping wet, the scale was screwy. He had a wrinkled, young-antique pan, and a couple of worried eyes.

Also, he was perfumed with the rare, ripe odor of bottled goods.

I recognized him as Eddie Ring, an ex-jockey who, the year previous, had been ruled off the turf forever. The judges had gotten tired of setting him down. Eddie was an expert when it came to whaling heck out of a horse with one hand and choking him to death with the other.

He had plenty of pull, but it wasn't the right kind!

Yet, the kid had been one of the best jocks the hide ovals had ever known. His judge of pace was beautiful.

He had a pair of unequaled hands, a daring in the saddle.

When he rode honest, he had brought in winners that looked like dray horses anywhere from the start to the four-furlong marker.

I was really fond of the little tosspot.

Once I had written quite a piece about Eddie Ring. It was the day after he had piloted Reggie Allerton's great bay colt, Sir Rodney, first under the wire in one of the Belmont classics.

And that after Sir Rodney had been practically knocked to his knees as he was leaving the gate!

“Can I see you a minute?” Eddie's straight Bourbon voice shook a little. He looked scared to death. “Any place! But—quick! I've got a tail on me!”

We ebbed out to the curb. Cabs came up in a long line.

I didn't ask questions. I opened the door of the nearest taxi, pushed Eddie in

and followed.

“Uptown, driver. Lenox Hill Apartments.”

Eddie took a gander through the back pane before he relaxed with a sigh.

“I think we slipped him.”

“What goes, kid?”

He twisted around. His teeth began to chatter like a couple of castanets. Now that he had shaken the one following him, the reaction left him jittery.

“Duke Kimball—somebody gunned him not thirty minutes ago!” He husked the words out, shivering. “I—I stopped in to see him! He was stiff and I ducked. There was a car in front of his place! Some guy got out and trailed me—”

I sat up straighter.

The Duke Kimball mentioned happened to be the trainer for the same wealthy Reginald Allerton who owned Sir Rodney. Kimball was the turf’s leading trainer. What Eddie Ring told me represented news—important news for anyone drawing weekly wages from a metropolitan newspaper.

In his own way, the Duke was as well known as the Brooklyn Dodgers, only nobody ever called him a bum.

“Hold it!” I grabbed the kid’s arm. “Where was Kimball bumped, what’s the address?”

Eddie spilled and I told the hackie to pull to the curb.

“You’re leaving!”

Eddie’s tone had a touch of hysteria when he saw me reach for the door handle.

I spoke fast.

“Look, kid. You go up there and wait. Apartment Four F. I’ve got something to nose into. I’ll be back as soon as possible. Roll, bud,” I directed the driver, handing him a couple of bucks. “Take this gentleman to where I told you. Get going.”

Then I cut across the avenue, flagged a southbound cab and hopped aboard.

TEN minutes later the cab wheeled up to the Hotel Craven, a small hotel in the West Forties. I knew it well. Patronized by stage and sporting people, the Craven was managed by Hal Bernard, an old friend of mine.

I recognized a police prowler car further up the street. That meant the cops were already on the job. One of them, an Ed Wheeler, who ran with the well-known Homicide Squad, captained by my old friend and enemy, Fred Mullin, was in the lobby when I went through.

I made like I didn’t see him and headed for the single elevator in the rear.

“Mr. Kimball’s floor,” I said to the elevator. At the same time I handed him a bill and that got service.

“The cops are up there, mister!” the operator wheezed.

“So what?”

He didn’t have an answer on tap. He stopped the lift at the fifth floor and slid the door open.

“Down the hall—to the left, mister.”

The door of Duke Kimball’s two-room suite was open. Detective Larry Hartley, and toothpick, were propped up against the jamb.

Larry gave me a cold stare when I leathered over.

“You can’t go in there, Castle,” he said. “On account—”

He stopped when the medical examiner, bag in hand, breezed out. He was Doc Sterling. Once a month I played poker with him. Just to keep on the right side I let him win a pot or two and that pleased him no end.

The doc was a fiend for breaking even, if he couldn’t show a profit.

“Hello! Johnny. Game Friday?”

I said “yes,” took advantage of the break and walked in.

Captain Mullin, with a couple of assistants, were in the center of a small

living room, kicking the ball of conversation around. Mullin, a short, stocky little guy, had pale, suspicious eyes and a jaw that looked as if it had been made from stuff out of a scrap drive. Once I had made a monkey of him in the *Orbit*, and the captain had never forgotten.

He liked me the same as the Nazi army does a Russian winter!

“What’s yours, Castle?” Mullin broke away from the group and got in front of me. “Don’t hand me any of that newspaper-pass stuff. You’re a sports writer. This is murder!”

“Kimball happened to train race-horses,” I said. “Skinners come under the heading of sports, I believe.”

I could have bitten off my tongue. Mullin snapped that up in a hurry. “So you know Kimball’s dead? Who told you? I had a faint idea this was official police business, hadn’t been released yet. What do you do—consult fortune-tellers?”

“Possibly.”

I tried to make it sound light and whimsical, but I felt like a dope caught in my own booby trap.

The lids came down over Mullin’s glinting eyes.

“You’d better stop down at Headquarters tomorrow, Castle. I think I’d like to have a little chat with you.”

“Sure, sure. Meanwhile,” I said, “I’ll just smell around.”

“You’d be closer to right,” Mullin said from the corner of his mouth, “if you left the ‘around’ out.”

I let that ride and took a glance at the place. The living room was typically Hotel Craven. Three-piece upholstered suite, regulation pictures on the wall, radio cabinet in a corner. Telephone on a stand. I noticed it was a private telephone. Its exchange number was under celluloid in the center of its dial.

I went on into the bedroom beyond.

A big cop leaned against the wall there. He didn’t pay much attention to me. I stopped on the other side of the threshold. The bedroom looked as if a cyclone had hit it.

There was blood all over the place, furniture knocked down, a general upheaval. Duke Kimball had evidently put up a better fight than the smackers I had looked at, such a short time previous, at the Garden!

The trouble was it had all been in vain.

The Duke was reposing on the disordered bed. He was in what was left of dark green pajamas. There was a bullet-hole in the side of his head so big you could have sailed a freighter through it. And his face wasn’t pretty. The killer had gone to work on it, probably with the butt of his gun, and with a perfect score.

Nobody in Kimball’s family would have recognized him!

The whole set-up had a slight touch of Satan in it—a fury both demoniacal and terrible.

Beside the bed, I stared down on the Duke. Trigger mortis had set in, but that didn’t prevent me from getting a gander at the gold wrist-watch Kimball wore.

I leaned over and saw the watch had stopped at exactly twenty-two minutes after ten o’clock.

Then, with a wrench at my stomach, I turned away and went back to the living room.

“What’s the angle, Captain?” I asked Mullin.

“See your fortune-teller.”

I did better than that.

In his office, off the lobby downstairs, I laped Hal Bernard. He was a big lug, six feet two, strong as an ox. I noticed he was drying a handkerchief on the windowsill.

“This is terrible. You know how murders kick back on hotel trade, Johnny.

Now I suppose you want all the details for your paper.”

“Who found Kimball?”

“One of the bellboys. Kid named Andy Garson. He took ice-water to Kimball every night at ten-thirty.”

“You’re sure about the time?”

“Tonight,” Hal said, “Andy tells me he was about five minutes late. Why? Is that important?”

“Everything’s important in a murder case. How about the elevator operator? Did he take anyone up, or bring anybody down, that struck him as being suspicious?”

**B**ERNARD rubbed his chin and shook his head. “I haven’t had time to check with him. The police asked a lot of questions before they let him go.”

The door opened and Hartley lounged in.

“The captain wants to see you again, Mr. Bernard.”

I said so-long to Hal and took to the street. The morgue cart was at the front door. I hoofed over to the *Orbit* office and found Bill Jamison still around.

Bill handled the mystery stories for the sheet. I passed him what details I had on the Kimball murder, he jotted them down and looked thoughtful.

“Funny this should happen on the eve of the mayor’s inspired investigation of race-track bookies, syndicates and the like. Or is it?”

“I wouldn’t know,” I said, and took another taxi up to my place.

## CHAPTER II

TIME: 10:27

**N**OT having my key I had to ring the bell.

I expected Eddie to open the door.

Instead, a blond doll with delft-blue eyes, earrings, a lipsticky mouth and perfume answered the buzz.

She was rather small. She had a good figure and was a reasonable facsimile of a hot spot chorine from the top of her bleached hair to the stilt heels of her little open-toed sandals.

Blue eyes drilled me.

“What’s yours?” she asked, and her voice had a touch of palsy.

“New maid?” I made it sound cheerful.

The eyes kept on boring me.

“If you’re looking for Mr. Castle—the party who lives here—he isn’t home.”

“He is—now,” I said, sliding past her. “Where’s Eddie?”

“In here.”

The little guy got up from a sofa where he’d been parked. I hung up my hat and coat, aware that Eddie looked better. His complexion was still a shade on the pea-green side, but at least he wasn’t shaking like a pair of dice.

“I thought you were never coming back,” he said.

I looked over at Blue Eyes.

“Who’s the babe?”

“Araby Rogers, my gal friend. I called her on the phone when I got up here. Honey, meet Mr. Castle.”

“Pleased to meet you. Pardon my mistake at the door. For a minute I had an idea you might be a copper.”

“Araby’s over at the Macarimbo—in the floor show,” Eddie pointed out.

“Yes, and I’ve got to get right back,” she stated.

“But not before a drink.”

“There’s nothing in the house,” Eddie piped.

“You didn’t look in the right place.”

I got what was practically extinct liquor and a bottle of soda. I took the Scotch back to the living-room, breaking the seal en route.

Eddie whiffed his off like it was so much fresh air. Araby shook her peroxide topknot.

"I'm on the wagon." She went over and kissed the former jockey. "Take care of yourself, Sugar. You won't let nothing happen to him, Mr. Castle!" she added anxiously.

"Not a thing," I promised.

She put on a mangy-looking cape. I went to the door with her, dropping a hint that it might not be smart to tell anyone where she had been or that Eddie was my guest.

"What do you think I am—a maroon?" she grated.

I listened to the stilt heels click off to the elevator and then shut the door and went back to Eddie. "Let's hear it, kid."

His story wasn't complicated.

Every Friday night Eddie had been in the habit of stopping at the Craven to see Kimball. The Duke hadn't forgotten that Eddie's winners had done a lot toward making him a top trainer. So, as the kid explained, Kimball had been giving Eddie dough every week. Not much, just a touch to keep him going.

Tonight, so Eddie explained, he reached the Craven around ten-thirty. He wouldn't take an oath on the exact time, but it was near that, either way.

"Duke had been living there for a long time, when he wasn't down at the track. If he wasn't in he'd leave the key for me under the mat, my money in an envelope on the table in the living room."

**E**DDIE stopped. I saw sweat break out on his wrinkled face.

"Keep going."

"The key wasn't there, so I figured he was in. I touched the button, rang the bell. There wasn't any answer. Then I took hold of the knob and it turned in my hand. I went in—"

He stopped again, beginning to shiver.

"What else?"

"There was a lamp lighted in the living-room. A funny smell, like burned gunpowder, was in the air. There was a light in the bedroom, too. So I—I walked to the door there and—"

He shuddered, reaching for the Scotch with a trembling hand. I let him gulp some down before giving him the prod again.

"Then you ducked. Okay. Tell me about the guy who tailed you. You said something about a car outside the hotel."

"That's right." Eddie tried to pull himself together. "It was to the left of the entrance. A little blue sedan. I passed it and crossed the street. Just as I reached the other side a guy dropped out of the heap. Before I had gone a street I knew he was following me. Then, when I got to the Garden, I dived into the crowd coming out and you know the rest."

"Did you recognize the tail?"

Eddie hesitated—a couple of seconds too long.

"No, I didn't."

"You don't know any reason why you were followed?"

He shook his head and I let it go at that. But I had a feeling Eddie was holding out. His story was plausible enough. It dovetailed with the bump at the Craven, but my hunch was he knew more than he had lipped.

Did he have a part in the actual killing! On the face of it, gunning the Duke didn't fit. People didn't go 'round shooting their benefactors. Unless, of course, there was some deep, dark and secret motive behind it.

I gave the kid the guest-room and sat up listening to the radio.

I thought about Kimball. Then I thought about Reggie Allerton, the man he had trained for. A week ago Allerton had announced his engagement to Lizzie

Wandell. Liz hailing from one of the oldest and finest Knickerbocker families, was the granddaughter of "Honest" Sam Wandell, one of the turf's leading sportsmen and a power in the local Jockey Club.

The *Orbit's* sob sister, who had toyed with the item, said, it was, "the perfect wedding—the merging of two top families, the blending of two famous stables. Society and the turf would be sure to benefit."

Just before I put out the light I came up with a recollection of Hal Bernard. Big, powerful Hal—and the handkerchief he had been drying on the window-sill.

Next morning I told Eddie to stay planted, sent him breakfast from the grill around the comer and took my A. M. newspaper with black coffee.

The Duke's demise had reached the front page. Jamison had done a good job on what scanty material I had supplied him with. He had also gone to town on the Mayor's Investigation.

I read that through.

It seemed that His Honor boiled again. This time over a reputed bookmaking syndicate that had an octopus hold on the town. Several names were mentioned. Among them was Joe Manion's.

That was news.

Manion, I happened to know, was an underworld overlord. Mixed in several Black Market matters, he had never been entirely reached by the law. Now, Manion was mentioned as a possible lead for a Grand Jury probe. I smiled when I read that. By the time they got around to Manion he'd be somewhere in South America, working rackets on the mañana mob.

At the office I stopped long enough to talk to Beth Wheaton. Beth, one of the phone gals, was as sharp as a January morning and just as chilly.

"Look, sweetheart," I began, before she interrupted.

"We can dispense with the sweet talk. What's on your mind—legitimately—Mr. Castle?"

Beth had brown eyes and hair to match. I gave her the telephone number that had been under celluloid on the instrument in Kimball's living-room—his private wire.

"I want you to do some sleuthing. Get the phone company to supply a list of all calls made from this number last night."

Beth sniffed.

"Oh, mystery? Who got rubbed this time?"

"Why don't you read the *Orbit*?" I suggested, and went on down to Headquarters.

MULLIN was in his private room, busy with a couple of plainclothesmen. He waved me to a chair and let me cool there for ten minutes or more.

Finally, when he got rid of the plainies, he moved his swivel-chair around so he could face me. The pale, suspicious eyes met mine.

"Give, Castle. What do you know about Kimball?"

"Next to nothing."

"Did you blow him up, walk out and come back later?"

"What do you think?"

Mullin began to get mad.

"How did you know Kimball was dead? Who tipped you?"

I tried to make it sound good. I didn't know if Ed Wheeler remembered seeing me walk through the lobby. I took a chance that he hadn't.

"It happens a pal of mine operates the Craven. Hal Bernard. I got the dope from him, including the slant on the bellboy who found the body."

I could see Mullin didn't believe me.

"That's all?"

"Certainly, fortune-tellers to the contrary."

Mullin let that go and began to smile. I didn't like it. It had kind of a wolf leer to it.

"By the way," he went on, casually. "You know Eddie Ring, the former jockey?"

That was striking close to home. The suspicious eyes kept boring into mine. It was a beautiful spot for a wrong expression, an incorrect answer. So the captain had a lead—on the little guy with the ginny breath and the worried pan?

"I know who he is. I guess everybody knows Eddie. He was the greatest horse rider in the country a year or so ago."

"Seen him lately?"

I made believe I was thinking.

"No, not recently. Why?"

"Ring went to see Kimball last night. Around the murder hour. He's been in the habit of dropping there every Friday evening. The elevator operator recognized him. And Ring," Mullin added, "isn't at his home address, or any of the drinkeries where he usually hangs out."

"So?"

"I figure," Mullin continued, putting his feet on the desk, "it was this kid Ring who tipped you to the Kimball slay. And I figure you know where Ring is. In fact, you know a whole lot more than you're letting on. Okay, Castle. If that's the way you want to play it, I'll go along with you. But in *my* way!"

His threat rang in my ears all the way over to the Pioneer A. C. where I had to interview the manager of a visiting professional basketball team and clear a couple of other minor matters for the *Orbit's* sporting page.

It was after one when I got back to the office.

Beth stopped me on the way in with the report from the telephone company.

"Here it is, Mr. Castle. Service with a sneer."

"Thanks."

I sat down at my desk and looked at the report. There had been two outgoing calls on the Kimball line the previous night. One at 8:30. That, according to the statistics, was to a Miss Libby Hart, whose address followed.

The other, the second call, made something tingle up and down my spine. I read the information over twice. At 10:27 P.M. the Duke's phone had been used to put a call through to Reginald Allerton at the Abbingdon Chambers on Park Avenue.

According to the wrist-watch on Kimball's arm, he had been knocked off at precisely 10:22. No one could be certain that the watch stopped when the Duke was struggling with his assassin. But, all things considered, it was a peg to hang the death time on.

If it were right it meant that, five minutes after Kimball was killed, someone had used his phone to call Reginald Allerton!

### CHAPTER III

#### JOHNNY IS FLOORED

**I** BUZZED my place on the hello box.

"Eddie?" I said.

"Right here, Mr. Castle."

"Did you call Allerton on the talkie last night when you were in the Duke's suite?"

"Call—nix! Like I told you, I got out fast. Why?"

"I was just wondering. You'd better stay hidden out today," I told him. "You're hot. I saw Fred Mullin of the H. S. and he's got a net out for you. The lift pilot at the Craven identified you."

I hung up and reached for a cigarette. After all, the Duke Kimball murder, with its satanic touch, was none of my business. It didn't enter my department, as Captain Mullin had already pointed out, and it was no skimmed milk off my cereal.

Yet, it had a certain fascination.

For one thing, I didn't want the cops to scoop Eddie in and give him more bad publicity. I didn't want the kid inquisitioned and locked up. Maybe his story had a couple of detours in it, but the more I thought of it the more unlikely and unreasonable it seemed to assume that he had anything to do with the untimely passing of Reggie Allerton's trainer.

Who was Libby Hart?

I DIDN'T know, but I decided to find out. The address the phone company supplied was in the middle Eighties, on West End Avenue. It was a nice apartment house, high-class and boasted a doorman. But, it developed, the Hart frail, merely roomed there. With a family named Borden—on the third floor.

She was out. Mrs. Borden, a middle-aged, pleasant dame, told me that when I pressed the pearl circle of the front doorbell.

"She'll probably be back here toward six. She's employed, you know."

I didn't, and said so.

"Yes, she's a private secretary to Mr. Reginald Allerton."

She mentioned the address of a Fifth Avenue office building.

With a word of thanks I went back to Riverside Drive and a bus.

The Rhinelander Building was up near Radio City. The directory in the entry read: REGINALD ALLERTON, 903. I took a local, got off at the ninth and followed an arrow around a bend in the corridor.

I figured the lay. Rich guys like

Allerton often maintained offices, and staffs, to handle the details of investments, taxes and so forth. Allerton's outer office was like the living room in a mansion. The walls were paneled in brown mahogany. The furniture was upholstered in tan leather. The rug underfoot was a tobacco brown and indirect lighting fell on the sporting prints along the walls.

It also shone on the polished black hair of the good-looking chick who was busy at a beautifully-carved desk in the exact center of the room.

I looked at her. She was worth anybody's third glance. In addition to the ebon hairdo, she advertised a creamy complexion, lashes so long they made shadows on her smooth cheeks, a classically perfect nose and a set of magenta lips.

She wore a severely plain dark dress and no ornaments. She didn't need any. When I got through with the eye massage and went over to the desk she looked up at me quickly.

It was odd.

I might have been all wrong, all damp, but in her liquid, starry gaze I thought I detected the same scared look that had been in Eddie Ring's eyes and face when he had put the stop on me outside the Garden.

"What do you want?" Libby inquired, after I had mentioned the *Orbit*. Reference to the sheet sent the lashes down again.

"Just a dash of information. Mind if I sit down?" I took a chair before she could answer. "You know Duke Kimball, Allerton's trainer, was given a dose of acute ventilation last night?"

A full minute passed before she nodded.

"Yes, I read about it."

Her pretty face was placid, but her slender, white hands were a give-away. They fluttered like a couple of adolescent

doves on the edge of a cote.

“Would you mind telling me why Kimball telephoned you last night at eight-thirty?”

The polished head jerked up. The magenta lips parted. Her teeth were nice, too. White, even, glistening. She looked at me as if I were a magician hauling a bunny out of a silk dicer.

“You—know—”

“Look, Miss Hart. There’s nothing complicated. The Duke had a private wire. The phone company furnished the calls made on it last night. Yours was one. I found that out. So will the police. It’s one of the first rules.”

“Mr. Kimball did call me.”

**S**HE wove her fingers together. Maybe to keep them from shaking off. Her expression changed. It went from fright to tight.

I could see the facial muscles tense.

“I’m sorry, I have no information,” she said. “The call was strictly personal. I see no reason to discuss it with you.”

“How about the police?”

I ran an eye around the prints. One of them was of the famous Sir Rodney and from where I sat it looked as if the kid who had the leg up was Eddie Ring.

“I shall tell the police the same thing—if they ask me.”

“Wouldn’t you like to have Kimball’s murderer tucked in the poogie?”

“Yes, but—please don’t ask me any more questions.”

“Only one. Mr. Allerton in?”

She gave me a startled glance.

“No, he isn’t. He’s gone for the day.”

I threw a final gander at her profile and got up.

“Then I’ll find him at the Abbingdon Chambers?”

“You’re more likely to locate him at the Turf Club.”

“Thanks. Thanks very much. Now I’ll tell you something. I think you’re being very foolish—holding back. Captain Mullin is an uncouth guy, nothing at all like I am.” I grinned. “He has no couth at all and never uses kid gloves. I might be able to keep you out of the papers—if you’d care to cooperate.”

But she shook her dark head.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Castle.”

The Turf Club was a couple of streets east and a couple north. A brownstone, old building with a mansard roof and nothing in the way of a sign to indicate its identity. It was one of those places hard as heaven to get into.

Once a member, only the Grim Reaper gave you a check to get out.

I looked the party who opened the door for me straight in his mutton chops and asked for Allerton.

“Who’s calling, if you please?”

I didn’t mention the *Orbit*. I didn’t want the guy to throw a stroke. I said I’d just come from Allerton’s office and told him my name. I let him infer my mission had something to do with Allerton’s business. That worked.

“One moment, if you please.” He went away, stayed a while and then came back. “Mr. Allerton will see you in the library.”

Reggie was in the big front room on the second floor. I recognized him because I’d seen him frequently at the track. He was a tall, slender, aristocratic-looking lug. He wore his hair parted in the middle, a set of snobby threads and a complexion that indicated high-blood pressure.

Allerton turned out to be excessively friendly. He listened to everything I said and, instead of yelping for the Palace Guards to come and pitch me out, told me he’d try to help me in any way he could.

“I’m naturally very distressed about what has happened to Duke. He’s been with me for several years. In addition to

being a fine trainer, Kimball was a very likable chap. I was genuinely fond of him."

"He never mentioned having any enemies?"

"Never. He had a host of friends. I don't know anyone who disliked him."

I let that pass. Any guy training horses to win races had enemies—touts and gamboliers who socked it in on long shots and shuddered when chalk horses won.

"About the phone call made at ten twenty-seven to your apartment last night."

I gave him the lead and waited. Important developments hinged on Reggie's reply. It was a six-to-five bet that the murderer had made that call.

Allerton rubbed his aristocratic nose and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Castle, I know nothing about it. I wasn't home at all last evening. I happened to be at the theater."

"Someone at your apartment must have gotten it. The call was made. It's on the record. Mind calling your place and checking with your servants?"

"Not at all." Allerton stood. "I want to do everything possible, in every way, to solve the riddle of Kimball's death. Pardon me a minute."

I sat and looked at books. Hundreds of books, thousands. I thought of all the cattle who had laid down their lives to make the pretty bindings. It was an intriguing thought.

I was still building it up when Allerton returned.

"What luck?"

"The call came through, just as you said. My man took it. It wasn't jotted down, as other calls are, because the person who called left no name. He simply asked for me and rang off when informed I was not at home."

"Thanks," I said, disappointment

kicking me in the teeth.

IT WAS almost six o'clock when I broke away from the office and got up to my apartment.

I wondered how Eddie had passed the day. I had locked up the Scotch. I hoped he hadn't gone out for a snifter. I hadn't given him any money and I remembered he hadn't made his usual collection from Kimball.

I didn't think his saloon credit was worth much. He had probably stayed holed in, with the radio for company.

As I slid my key into the front door I had a funny feeling. One of those intuitive flashes everything wasn't at par. It deepened when I stepped into the foyer. The air was warm and stuffy. It might have been imagination but some of Araby's perfume seemed to be still loitering around. Or maybe it was a hangover from the previous evening.

"Hi, kid."

No answer. I dropped my skimmer on the table under the hall mirror, took the seven steps to the living room door.

One glance was enough.

The room looked as though The Chief had gone through it at top speed. Like Kimball's bedroom, only without the plasma, the furniture was tipped over, one of the drapes ripped down and some of my prized old glass reduced to splinters.

But that wasn't as important as Eddie Ring! And Eddie, I had a hunch, was among those absent. Somebody had called at the apartment to remove the jock. He hadn't wished to be exited.

He had even fought against it, but not with success.

I started toward the bedroom.

Then, as I passed the half-open bathroom door, I imagined I heard a step behind me. A quick, quiet step!

Instinctively, I wheeled around.

I never saw what hit me—or who delivered the blow. Like a switch pulled open and plunging out all existing light, a wave of blackness came up from the floor and blotted out everything.

My knees buckled. I floated off on a soft, billowy cloud.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT THE MACARIMBO

**A**FTER a while the song birds stopped warbling. The black, chiffon clouds rolled away. I opened my eyes, a pain in my knob sending out a boogie beat that echoed in my ears.

I sat up, listening to it. Only it wasn't in my head. It was at the front door. Somebody was knocking.

Except for an egg-sized lump over my left ear, I didn't seem too badly off. I was a trifle dizzy when I made my full height. But that wore off when I put the brogans into high.

I opened the door and Detective Larry Hartley wandered in.

"What's the matter with your front doorbell, Castle? It don't work."

I tried to stall him in the foyer. No dice. He headed straight into the living room and looked around with a kindle of interest. I could see his bushy eyebrows form a great big interrogation point.

"Cute, eh?"

"What's been going on?" Hartley grunted. "Looks like the happy end of a Greenpoint picnic. Your friends play rough."

"What's wanted?"

"You!" Hartley squinted at the lump over my ear and grinned.

"Get your hat—get two hats. The captain craves your company. Come on, we're due downtown."

Mullin didn't pull any punches. My head still ached dully. The captain wasn't any bromide.

"Wheeler tells me he saw you going into the Craven last night. He said you didn't stop to talk to Bernard until you came down."

"All right, I'm a liar. So what?"

"You know where Ring is."

Mullin began to get red around the gills.

"I wish I did!" I replied fervently.

"You knew where he was last night. All the time I was looking for him you could have put the arm on him for me!"

"That's possible."

Mullin curled a lip. That made him look more like a bulldog than a bulldog. He leered up at Hartley, with one of those "See-what-I-mean" expressions.

I didn't have anything to hide now. So I unloaded with truth and candor.

"I let Eddie Ring stay at my apartment. Why? Because the kid's clean and I didn't want you to go to work on him. Somebody hi-jacked him. But not without a brawl. If you don't believe me ask your bloodhound. Hartley saw the going-over my living room got."

I refrained from mentioning the gent in the bathroom—the one who had jumped me and laid the egg on the side of my noggin. That was beside the point, irrelevant.

Fred Mullin's facial hue went from rosy red to deep vermilion. For an instant I thought he was going to barge over and start socking, he looked that mad. He showed me all his teeth, all twelve of them, in a snarl that would have interested a tiger.

"By rights I ought to slap you in the clink, Castle!" He spat it out humidly. "You're a nuisance, a menace. You made a fool of me once and you've been trying

to repeat ever since! I've got a good mind—”

Hartley leaned over and whispered something to him. Mullin stopped talking, but kept on glaring, while he listened. Finally he nodded and sank back in his desk-chair.

“That’s all, Castle. Beat it, get out of here! I don’t like the looks of you. You make me sick.”

“You don’t give me much appetite, either,” I told him.

I thought it was a gag, but nobody made a move to check me. I left the office and Headquarters without a hand, or a foot, barring the way.

**T**HAT was one for the book. What had Hartley told Mullin? What had made the captain lay off? From what I knew of his methods it wasn’t anything pleasant. He had quit putting on the crush for some other trick he had thought up. Something sponsored by the toothpick-chewing addict, Mr. Hartley.

“Rats!” I said, and went back to straighten up my disordered living room.

I was worried about Eddie. So worried I called the Macarimbo, trying to get hold of Araby Rogers. I was informed that the “ladies of the ensemble” were not permitted to answer the telephone.

I got a bite of dinner at a nearby chophouse and went back to the suite. I listened to war news and put witch hazel on the bump. It felt larger than ever.

Then I must have dozed a bit because when I snapped out of it the war bulletins had turned to a dance band and the telephone beside me was ringing merrily.

I picked it up and was jolted wide awake.

“That you, Mr. Castle?” Eddie asked.

“You little rat!” I was so glad to hear from him I didn’t care what I said. “Where are you? What have you been doing? Who

tore up my apartment and busted my expensive glass knick-knacks? Talk!”

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell you about it when I see you. That’s why I called. Look, I’m over here at the Macarimbo. I’m phoning from the booth near the dressing rooms. I’ll wait here for you. Can you come right over?”

**T**HE night club was a half-dozen streets south, in the fabulous Fifties. It was in the middle layer, neither cheap nor expensive. One of those hoof-and-tipple resorts where they clipped you on the check if you were at all muddled.

It bragged about its floor show, name band and master of ceremonies. You could have taken all of them, tossed them out in the alley and the world would have been a better, fresher place.

As I left the apartment, heading for the Macarimbo, I felt I was being trailed. It was one of those uneasy, elusive but positive feelings. I tried to trace back from effect to cause. Nothing definite. I began to think I was mistaken.

If I were tailed, it was being done by an expert. Somebody who gave plenty of leeway and kept discreetly in the background.

When I reached the Macarimbo, and went in, there wasn’t a soul on the street.

The bar, in front, had ‘em packed in like sardines. Only sardines were better off because they were lying down. Babes from penthouses and frowzy rooming-joints—dames who looked like Salome and acted like salami—went in or came out of the powder room.

For the most part their escorts were equally as ill assorted. Guys as Blue Bookie as Reggie Allerton or just plain bookie.

There were plenty of uniforms at the tables. Army, Air Force, Marine, Navy, with the feminine sections of the services

also ably represented.

I eased over to the head man. He wore a tux and a maltreated ear. Once he had pushed leather. Now he shoved waiters around.

“Hello, Yorkie.”

“How’ya, Johnny boy?”

“How do I get back to the dressing rooms?”

Yorkie rolled an eye.

“Uh-uh.”

He supplied directions. I went around back of the coat-room counter, down a flight of smelly stairs. A wooden-floored passage led past the kitchens. I looked through the steamy entrance. A chef in a big white hat was bobbing and weaving as he stirred and tasted.

A door at the end of the corridor opened on a squared-in recess and just beyond that was an aisle of dressing-room doors. Some were open, some shut. Gals were laughing and gabbing, arguing and swearing.

As I went up the stairs, Araby Rogers came out of one of the rooms. She was in lace and spangles, a costume that didn’t cover too many of her charms. The little canary saw me, stopped as if she’d been shot, and dashed over.

“Mr. Castle,” Her breath caught in her throat. “Is Eddie—”

“Okay. He phoned me to meet him here.”

The blue, blue eyes went wide and panicky. She grabbed my arm, pushing me out of earshot. I could feel her fingers growing chilly when they dropped to my wrist.

“Eddie—phoned *you*—to meet him here! Oh, something must have happened! He hasn’t been here, he never comes here! Are you sure it was Eddie?”

“Positive.”

She gave me a stricken look. Her voice sank to a whisper.

“I’m scared, Mr. Castle. Honest I am. This don’t sound good to me. He’s in trouble! He never called you, and told you that stuff, unless he had a gun pointed at him!”

It began to look that way. Whoever had snatched the kid was using him for a purpose. What was it? To get me out of the apartment? Or to take me to the Macarimbo for some further going over?

“Who’d want to put the clamp on Eddie?” I said, reassuringly. “He’s as harmless as talcum powder.”

“Yeah? Then why did ‘Link’ Bronson follow him last night?” Araby asked unsteadily.

My ears went up.

SO EDDIE had known who had tailed him! One of the kinks in the story he had told me straightened out. Bronson? He was one of Joe Manion’s henchmen, a gun-happy hoodlum who had been in plenty of trouble!

“I’ll duck back to the flat,” I told the blondie. “If Eddie does show up here you ring me this time.”

I left her. She had a bewildered, blank stare on her grease-painted face. Just as I went down the steps some guy went in and I heard him saying:

“C’mon, dolls! Get into it! You’ve got a show in five minutes. What are you gazing at, Rogers—”

There was another door midway down the passage, a little beyond the kitchen entrance. I hadn’t noticed it before. Now it was slightly open, letting in some of the cool night air to battle with the steam. A man lounged there, a hand in his pocket. He had a cap pulled down over his forehead, a cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

My nerves telegraphed a warning. Danger was written all over him. I didn’t like the hand in his pocket, either. I slowed

down, stopped and gave an imitation of someone who had forgotten something and was about to retrace my steps when the inner telegraph system flashed a new warning.

Another man was coming along the passage, from behind me. A guy in a gray felt hat, with a thin, pinched face. A tall guy with stooped shoulders and a funny kind of a shuffling walk.

I was hemmed in. I thought of the kitchen, but before I could take a step toward it, the lounge with his hand in his pocket slid up to me.

“Just a minute, pal! Got a match?”

I started to shoulder him aside, but Felt Hat didn't approve of that. Several inches of cold steel slipped out from under the left side of his coat and jammed up against me.

“Easy, friend.” His voice was smooth and quiet, but under the brim of the hat I could see his eyes like twin, glittering sparks. “Frisk him, Link,” he directed.

Quick, deft hands investigated. Link—I recognized him now—nodded and the Hat closed in.

“We're taking a little roll uptown, friend! You're coming along. Act smart and you'll get there with all your health. Try any tricks and I'll make you look like a kitchen colander!”

## CHAPTER V

### MIRACLE GUN

**O**UTSIDE, in the shadows down the street, a small blue sedan hugged the curb. I was conducted to it, urged along by an arm and the pressure of the smoker transferred over to my side.

Link opened the rear door. There was a guy at the wheel.

“Get in!” Bronson ordered.

“All clear,” the driver said.

I sat between Bronson and the party who wore the felt hat. He was referred to as “Rube.” The chauffeur was addressed as “Smitty” and the gun, cuddling me, never moved an inch.

“What's this all about?” I inquired, with real curiosity.

“Shut up!” Rube said in his quiet, silky tone.

“I think,” I went on, amiably, “you've got the wrong one. You don't want me. I'm only a newspaper reporter who—”

“If that bull hadn't knocked on your front door, after I snapped the bell wires,” Bronson interrupted, “you'd been up to where we're going, a long time ago! As it was I had to check out of your place in a hurry.”

“So you're the bathroom boogey man?”

Bronson laughed. He didn't say anything further and I relaxed against the worn upholstery.

I didn't like any part of it. They didn't have the wrong guy! They wanted me and they had me!

But what for?

I watched the mid-city streets drop past. Smitty drove at a legal speed, careful of the traffic lights. He didn't want any cops stopping him, asking questions.

My mind went around like a squirrel in a cage. Gleams of intelligence began to filter through. I lined up the facts as they came along.

First, Eddie Ring knew that Bronson had tailed him last night. That meant that Eddie had blundered into Duke Kimball's suite at the Craven while the killer was still there. Eddie had seen and recognized the trigger man. Like the ex-jock said he had gotten out in a hurry—but with Link sent out after him to make a score.

Okay for that.

Bronson must have seen Eddie with me outside the Garden. Okay again. That

told him that Eddie had probably spilled. Therefore, I knew who had murdered the Duke and had to be dealt with accordingly. Bronson's first attempt to knock me out had failed. As Araby had dreamed up, they had snatched Eddie and, to get to me, had used the little guy to make the appointment via phone.

So far so bad.

My thoughts limped along. Link Bronson worked for Manion. Manion faced a Grand Jury hearing. In some way that tied in with Kimball. Kimball must have known something about the activities of the syndicate under official fire. Known so much Manion was afraid of him! So, abiding by all underworld rules and regulations Allerton's trainer had to be smeared before he had a chance to open his trap.

That hung together sensibly. It had its flaws, naturally. But I believed I had a general synopsis of the situation. And, as I mulled it over, the personal angle—my own nosy part in it—wasn't at all attractive at the moment.

In fact, the smell of lilies seemed strong around me.

The blue sedan went up through Washington Heights. It kept cutting west. Above Kingsbridge it turned left, descending a hill and took a street that ended in a road. The Hudson wasn't far away. In the faint moonlight I could see the Palisades looming opposite.

They made a pretty picture. I fervently hoped I'd be around to get a glimpse of it in the future.

Then, abruptly, I knew where we were bound. Near the bank of the river was an old stone mansion. It had been called The Castle Orme. Once it had belonged to one of Manhattan's merchant princes. That had been fifty years or more back.

Several people had owned it since. The last had lost it. A downtown bank had

taken it over and rented it at a negligible figure. No one in his right mind—or without ulterior motives—would have been interested in the rambling rookery.

It was like leasing the Grand Central Terminal—without modern touches.

The car went through an open iron gate. It passed what had once been formal gardens. It went by a tremendous hot-house. Most of the glass had been broken or taken away. We parked under a couple of colossal trees near a side entrance.

"We get out here," Rube said.

All three alighted. Keeping me in the middle they gave me a personal escort through a door that was a foot thick. We went along a flagged hall.

"Hold him in the wire room," Link Bronson said to the others, "while I talk to the boss."

He opened a door. I was ushered into what must have been the main reception room once. Now it was the most complete kind of a horse parlor.

IN THE shine of a green-shaded, dangling light I had a glimpse of cashiers' cages, tables and chairs, blackboards with the odds of the last races of that afternoon still chalked on them.

Over the boards was a loud-speaker. Entries were thumbtacked on one wall and the floor was covered with cigarette stubs. Rube shoved me up against a table and grinned.

"Relax, sucker."

"Where's Eddie?" I asked.

"He's around—but not for long."

"It looks to me," Smitty put in brightly, "like another cement job. The boss was asking about barrels this afternoon—three of 'em."

"He got them."

That sounded interesting. A croak, gangland's old device of stuffing the corpse in wet cement and the convenient

river at the edge of the Castle lawn! But three?

Who was the third barrel for?

Bronson came back.

“Bring him along.”

The next stop was in a rear room, a vaulted-ceilinged place of oak-paneled walls and an ecclesiastical aspect heightened by the pipes for an organ that had been removed.

The furnishings were flamboyant, glorified junk. Grand Rapids at its worst. Tapestries and odd pieces collected solely because of their size. A litter of tables and chairs, sofas and cabinets made the huge room resemble a furniture warehouse. But not a very good one.

Lounging in a chair that had carved dragons for arms, Joe Manion sat uncomfortably at ease. He looked like Humpty-Dumpty, he was that round and fat. He had thin hair, plastered over a bald spot, baggy eyes and a dewlap. His face was circular in shape, shaved very close. His nose was like a lump of putty that had been slapped on as an afterthought. He looked too stupid to be dangerous, but I didn't let his gray-flanneled appearance fool me.

Manion and a coiled cobra were brothers under the scales!

“So you got up?” Manion spoke slowly, as if it were an effort to get the words out.

“What's the frame, Manion?” I asked directly.

“I don't like snoopy people.” His smile made folds in his face. “Guys who go 'round checking on telephone calls and the like. Guys who know too much for their own good.”

“Such as Kimball?” I suggested.

“Right. Such as Kimball. You can say hello to him when you get to where you're going.”

“Wait a minute.” I bent forward.

“What good is another knock-off going to do you? It is not going to stop the Grand Jury's machinery. Personally, your business is none of mine. If you want to lay it on the line for the death-house at Sing Sing that's your privilege.”

“Look, Castle. I'll talk, you listen. I'm going to beat the investigation. All right, smile. I've taken it before and I can stand up under it again. But I'm not going to have a lot of people running around loose with an in on the Kimball thing. That's why I had you lifted tonight and that's why I'm giving you a decent funeral. Buried at sea!”

He shook with a brief spasm of amusement. The laughter made my blood run cold. But not as cold as it did when one of the many doors in the room opened and two of my other comrades in trouble were led in.

The first was Eddie, looking dejected and slightly mussed. He was wearing the latest thing in black eyes. That was tough with ration points what they were on beef. He gave me a hangdog, appealing look.

I let it go and stared hard at Libby Hart.

She was certainly attractive. Even against the nightmarish background she stood out like a bottle of rum at a prayer meeting. Her black hair looked more polished than ever, her skin whiter and her eyes more starry, liquid. She walked in with dignity, free-limbed, as if to the music of the organ that wasn't there.

My heart went bump-bump. The dark eyes encountered mine. I saw a spot of color creep into her smooth cheeks. Her lips parted slightly and pearls such as Tiffany never had for sale glimmered between them.

For a moment I forgot Manion, Eddie, the vaulted room and why we were all there! I gave Libby a smile I didn't feel and turned to the Dumpty whose fingers

were caressing the dragons.

“The gal, too. Where does she fit?”

The telephone, somewhere in the back of the room, rang. Manion nodded and Link took it. Manion turned back to me.

“Like you, she’s smart. Kimball’s been passing it along, feeding it to her.” He grinned. “The jock, likewise. You three are the only ones with a mark against me. Catch it?”

“It’s Scollard.” Bronson capped the mouthpiece of the phone with a skinny hand. “He wants to talk to you, Boss. It’s important!”

Manion puffed out of the chair and went across the room.

“Hello?” I heard him say, “Didn’t I tell you never to call me here?” Then, after a pause, “Confession? What do you mean? He—he—”

Manion stopped and stiffened as much as a load of fat and flesh could. The round face darkened. He choked out something and banged the receiver back on the hook.

I did some fast thinking. Confession? While the phone call had been going on I had a gander at a door that seemed to be open an inch or two. A door that was part of the paneling, to the left of the dragon chair.

**S**LOWLY, unobtrusively, I edged toward it, my face to the others, my nerves taut. Any chance, logic told me, was better than standing there and having the Valentine’s Day massacre repeated on a small scale!

Libby was watching me intently. So was Eddie. Manion, apparently shaken by the call, got Bronson aside and was doing some swift whispering with gestures. I backed another foot and felt the oak paneling press against me.

Then a miracle happened!

From the door a hand touched me. A gentle, persuasive, significant hand. It

seemed to be telling me in a mute way that it wanted to reach my fingers! So I slowly slid my arm back.

A gun, coldly ominous, but comforting as an ice-bag on a fevered brow, was laid against my palm!

Manion, finished with Bronson, waddled back to the center of the room.

“All right, line them up! You do the shooting, Rube!” As he barked the order, Bronson, giving his cap a pull over his forehead, left the room.

Rube began to reach for his heater. I stopped his hand halfway to his shoulder-scabbard with a quartet of words.

“Hold it! Start reaching!”

The miracle gun came into full view. Manion looked at me as if I were something that had stepped out of a glass case in a museum. The shock of what I said, and how I backed it up, straightened Rube’s stooped shoulders.

He gaped at me incredulously.

“You dope!” Manion’s voice trembled. “You bring him here without frisking him! Go get him!”

“Ladies first!”

I kept the two covered. Libby didn’t need a second invitation. She glided over to me as if on wires. Eddie, amazed, hardly moved.

“Come on, kid,” I ordered. “Get the lead out of your shoes. Put on a whip finish. We’re getting out of here!”

## CHAPTER VI

### CONFESSION A LA MODE

**L**IGHTNINGLIKE, I slammed the door leading out to the flagged passage. I didn’t kid myself. Miracle gun, or not, we weren’t in the clear yet!

The proof of that came when Eddie tore open the side door of the Castle and we piled out into the night. The stars never

looked better, neither did fresh air ever feel fresher or smell more like perfume. Or maybe that was the scent of Libby, hurrying along beside me.

But Link Bronson was out there. Manion's first lieutenant, starting the blue sedan, must have seen us framed against the light as we came out the door. He sized up the situation at a glance and acted fast.

Out of the car, he ripped a gun loose and began firing. I urged Libby Hart into the stone shelter beside the door's entrance. Eddie flopped full length. I held my fire until Bronson came cautiously out from the car's bulk.

No more than sixty seconds had elapsed, but it seemed like a thousand years before he came into view. I could see him craning his neck, ready to count bodies.

It was almost impossible to miss.

The shot I squeezed from the gift gun caught him in the shoulder. He let out a yelp, dropped his own Roscoe and did a nose-dive into the shrubbery.

"Okay! Come on!" I grabbed Libby's arm and sprinted for the car.

Just as we got in I heard a cannonading from the interior of the Castle. That meant my unknown pal on the other side of the oak paneling had gone to work!

Link had obligingly left the motor running. I let off the brake, pressed the gas pedal and went away from there like one of the honest horses Eddie Ring had ridden in his palmy days!

"For a couple of minutes," the kid chattered, "I thought I was all through! Where'd you get the gun? How come they missed it! Who was shooting when we left?"

He rolled the questions out like a red carpet at a wedding. I paid no attention.

"Give," I said to Libby. "How did they pick you up? Why?"

"A fake phone call. Supposedly from

Mr. Allerton. This car was on West End Avenue when I went out. A man—the one you shot—stepped up to me and forced me into it. Why?"

"Yes, why?"

SHE drew a long breath. By that time we were almost over to Broadway and for the first time I began to feel a trifle safer.

"Haven't you figured it yet?"

"I know Kimball was ready to squeak. They didn't like that and dealt with him accordingly. Manion, or Rube, went to work with artistic touches. They're the killers, either of them, but there's someone else in on it. The 'man higher up', as we say in the newspaper business."

"You mean—"

"Patience. If this heap has plenty of gas you'll find out presently."

The fuel tank gauge said three-quarters full. It must have been. We sailed down Park Avenue in style. I pulled up in front of the Abbingdon Chambers, told my passengers to wait and ducked into the building's rococo lobby.

I was bound for Allerton's suite. I didn't figure there was much chance of seeing him, but the angle was hot and I had to follow through. An elevator took me up. Maybe I was all wrong.

That single word "confession," and what Joe Manion had unwittingly let drop when I had first gabbed with him, seemed to make it airtight and foolproof.

I rang Allerton's front door-bell. I had the feeling, when no one answered, I was too late.

Then the door opened. A little guy with a smug, obsequious face stepped out. He wore a black coat, a derby and carried a cowhide bag.

He jerked an inquisitive look at me as I reached out and pushed him against the door he started to close.

"Mr. Allerton in?"

"No, sir."

His eyes blinked and his lips twitched.

"Who are you?"

"Scollard, sir. I—I'm—"

I took his bag, tossed it inside and put the gun on him. As soon as he felt it he began to shake all over. He didn't try to argue or block me. With perfect docility he let me back him into the apartment and led the way, through a maze of rooms, to Allerton's study.

Reggie, his hair still parted in the middle, lay on the floor there, in a posture that wasn't lifelike. The automatic he had used to go harp-strumming was still clutched in his aristocratic right hand. He was as dead as anybody could be with a .45 slug in what had been his brain.

"Okay, Scollard," I said to the little guy. "Now, hand over your late employer's confession and stick around while I put in a call to Headquarters!"

"Yes, sir," he answered meekly.

**T**WO hours later Eddie, Libby and I had a table at the Macarimbo.

It was no place to take a gal of the Hart number's quality and intelligence, but Eddie had a yen to see Araby and I couldn't refuse him.

I was amply rewarded when the final floor opera began. Because then the gilt top, prancing roguishly out with the other lovelies, suddenly spied her Eddie, black eyes and all, sitting there grinning like a wolf. Araby almost fell over her own feet from the shock.

"Get around back and comfort her," I advised Eddie, when the number ended. "Show her you're not a ghost!"

He lammed.

I turned to Libby.

"Well, let's fill in the blank spaces. From a peek at Allerton's confession I'm wise to a lot of things. That most of his

dough came from Manion. That he was a silent partner in the syndicate. That he realized an investigation would wash him out and hang him up to dry. That it would kill his chances of matrimony with Wandell's granddaughter and finish him on the turf as well. So much for that. Now it's your turn."

"Kimball had found out a lot about Allerton's connections with Manion. I'm sorry to say the Duke tried to use this information for his own profit."

"I get it. He tried to blackmail Reggie. That's why Allerton passed the word to Manion to blow Kimball up. And it was Manion who used the Duke's telephone at ten twenty-seven. No doubt he called Allerton to tell him the job had been taken care of. That was the call," I explained, "that gave the show away."

Libby's arched brows drew together.

"I don't understand."

"Manion said he didn't like guys who went around checking telephone calls. I hadn't told Eddie and I hadn't told you about the ten twenty-seven buzz. But I had told Allerton. I went to see him about it. So when Manion let it slip I knew that Reggie was in on it."

The dark head nodded. "And you figured out 'confession' and Scollard all by yourself?"

"That wasn't hard. The thing that baffled me was the gun slipped into my hand up there."

The liquid, starry eyes met mine.

"You haven't cleared that up," Libby murmured.

"My old side-kick, Captain Mullin of the Homicide Squad, obliged. You see, when I turned over the defunct power behind the syndicate, together with a neatly-typed confession, Mullin was grateful—grateful enough to tell me how it happened. One of his best men had been planted at the Castle since the mayor

started the ball rolling. Planted there, gathering evidence. He shoved me the heater, figuring I'd need it more than he did. I guess he had another one on him because he blocked Manion and Rube when they tried to follow us."

"And they're both in jail?"

The band was letting go with one of my favorite numbers. I got up. So did Libby.

"Nothing like a dance to get acquainted." I led her out to the wax. "Tell me something frankly. Is or isn't this the

beginning of a beautiful friendship? Funny, I sort of had an idea you might be carrying the torch for Kimball."

"On account of that phone call?" She laughed. "I had helped him, up to the time I realized what he was doing and why he wanted information about Allerton. But, sentimentally—"

She made a grimace.

I liked the way she pursed her red lips—the way she wrinkled her nose—and kissed back!