



Hollister pocketed the bill but turned away from the grisly spectacle

## THE BIG MONEY MAN

By WAYLAND RICE

*When the Cash Comes in Accompanied by a Corpse, Publicity Agent Hollister Has Reason to Wish He Were Broke Again!*

**T**ONY ARNOLD looked worried. Across the table from him was the young man who rented this office. His name was Hal Hollister and he was a slender, good-looking person of average height. "Mr. Hollister, how did you ever get into such a mess?" Tony Arnold said.

Hollister grinned. He was down, but not exactly hugging the floor. One shoulder still remained off the mat, though there was terrific pressure upon it.

"Mess is the right word," he replied. "It began innocently enough. I had a girl friend who aspired to the movies and wanted me to help her get publicity. I did—and the racket turned out to be just my dish. Well—I had to make or break myself on what I could do for her so I put every nickel I had into it."

"Did she get to Hollywood?" Arnold asked.

"Uh-huh. First, some night club work and neat publicity about getting married to a

millionaire. Of course it was rigged. Then she got into a musical show and I created more publicity. The real stuff it was and it went over big. The movies came for her. That's when I moved into these offices, figuring I was all set."

"At two hundred and fifty a month you took some risk." Arnold glanced around the richly furnished office.

"Why not?" Hollister asked. "I said it was make or break and a publicity agent has to give a good account of himself too. This office spelled success and money. Well—my girl friend went to Hollywood, made a picture and fell flat on her pretty face. Seems there were no brains behind it and making movies takes brains, I've heard."

Arnold shrugged.

"Well, Hal," he continued, "I'm sorry, but what I said still goes. You know, old man Angus McVicker takes no credit from anyone. You paid four months' rent in advance. It was up a week ago. Angus says you'll have to get."

"Angus," Hollister grunted, "has a moneybag for a heart. Talk about publicity. Did you see what I got?"

Hollister passed over a copy of a legal journal. In it was a paid ad to the effect that Angus McVicker was in the process of forcing one Hal Hollister into involuntary bankruptcy.

"It's really a laugh," Hollister said. "He thinks I own this furniture. All his ad did was to bring down every blasted creditor I have on my neck. Furniture company, printer, hotel. Even the telephone company. You'd think a big concern like that wouldn't notice when a chap owes them forty-seven dollars. Frankly, I expect to get a call any minute telling me to listen well because it's the last time I'll hear anything over this phone. Well, let them . . ."

The phone promptly rang, as if it had ears and a brain. Hollister laughed dryly, nodded to Arnold and picked up the

instrument.

"I know all about it," he said. "You can stop service when . . . what? Who did you say it was? Cumming? Clark Cumming? THE Clark Cumming? Well, I—yes, sir, I handle publicity. Yes, of course. Right away? Well, I'm somewhat tied up, but then you're an important man. I'll be right over."

Hollister hung up.

"Hold everything, including Angus," he told Arnold. "As building manager, you haven't seen me on business until morning. That was Clark Cumming, the millionaire philanthropist. The man who won't let a reporter within a mile of him. He wants me for some publicity work. Imagine that!"

ARNOLD glanced at his watch as he arose.

"This is a funny time for a new client to contact a publicity agent. It's almost midnight. But—I wish you luck, Hal, Hate to see a nice lad like you thrown out on your ear. Make Cumming come through with enough advance to put old Angus off for another month."

"I'll get enough to pay for the layout for a year," Hollister gloated. "Man alive, this is just what I've been waiting for. The one break a man needs and it came at my darkest moment. From here on, I go places. Tony—got five? I'm plenty flat?"

Arnold smiled and dug a hand into his pocket.

"Well, if you've a client like Cumming, I guess I can risk it. Good luck, Hal."

Half an hour later, while he rang the bell of Clark Cumming's suburban mansion, Hal Hollister still thought it was all part of some beautiful dream. It was Cumming himself who answered the door. He was a white-haired, austere man with a reputation for generosity and self-isolation. His picture had been in the papers, about as many times as Hollister had thumbs on both hands. Cumming

hated publicity.

"I'm Hollister," Hal said. "You sent for me. Remember?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Hollister. I'm glad you were so prompt. My business with you is vitally important and demands speed as well. Come in. This way—to my library."

A good part of the crowd at Grand Central Terminal would have fitted comfortably into the room Cumming called his library. It was lined with books and filled with deep, luxurious chairs. A pair of antique lamps were lit and they threw a feeble glow over only part of the room. Hollister wondered if it was his imagination or the top of a man's head which rested against the high back of one chair.

At any rate, he figured this was none of his business. If Cumming wanted someone present, he was at liberty to arrange that. Hollister sat down and accepted a cigarette from Cumming.

"My qualifications," Hollister opened proceedings, "can be checked with any movie company, stage producer, columnist or newspaper. I get results. Guarantee 'em, sir."

"I'm not interested in that," Cumming smiled wanly. "You see. I hired you to do things in reverse. I want my name kept out of the papers."

"Out of the papers," Hollister said with a sinking heart. "You mean—out?"

"Precisely. I'm on the way toward getting some publicity which I hate. This will be adverse and therefore even more detestable. I thought a good publicity agent might be able to help me. You should know ways to keep my name out of the papers."

"Perhaps I can." Hollister was grasping at straws and he knew it. When he met a reporter, he couldn't hold his tongue if he had anything in the way of news and the mere mention of Clark Cumming could be front page stuff.

"The terms," Cumming said, "will be

generous. A thousand dollars now—before you even know about the case. Four thousand more if my name isn't in the papers by day after tomorrow. If it doesn't get in by then, it never will."

A thousand dollars. Men had been killed for less. Hollister grabbed the straw with both hands this time. He almost grabbed the single one-thousand-dollar bill that Cumming proffered. Yes, within himself, something warned Hollister to be careful. Taking on an assignment, the nature of which he hadn't the remotest idea, was dangerous. Cumming might ask the impossible.

"I'm ready, sir," Hollister said weakly. "Tell me the details."

Cumming arose.

"Come over here and I'll show you the details," he said grimly. He walked to the high-backed chair in which Hollister thought he'd seen someone sitting. Now he knew he wasn't wrong.

The chair was occupied.

By a man with a hole through his vest, shirt—and heart. He was very dead and very chalky looking.

Hollister gulped. His stomach was doing a flip-flop. He wasn't used to this sort of thing. Without a word he turned to Cumming and extended his right hand. The fingers still gripped the thousand dollars.

"Nonsense, man," Cumming snorted. "Put the money in your pocket and then listen to me. I didn't kill this man. He committed suicide."

Hollister felt the first glow of hope. He automatically pocketed the bill, but turned away from the grisly spectacle at the same time. So long as Cumming hadn't murdered the man, there might be a way out. At the same time he need retain no more than an uneasy conscience.

"Here are the facts," Cumming said. "You're entitled to them. This man—frankly, I don't even know who he is—came to see me

about an hour and a half ago. Unfortunately, all my servants are off this evening and I let him in. He wanted money.”

“A stickup?” Hollister gasped.

“Oh no—hardly that. The poor fellow was entitled to a hearing, I suppose. You know that I am accustomed to help my fellow men. I frequently provide money, in worthy cases, for medical treatment, college training and things of such nature. Well, this man claimed he was very ill. Something about his stomach. He needed fifteen hundred dollars. Now I’m not a fool. I demanded time to investigate his statements.”

“Naturally.” Hollister was beginning to feel more at ease. He almost summoned the nerve to turn around and look at the dead man.

“Naturally,” Cumming repeated. “The man told me there wasn’t time for him to be investigated so, because I didn’t like his attitude, I told him to leave. Instead, he pulled out a gun, placed the muzzle against his heart and pulled the trigger.”

Hollister retained some measure of suspicion.

“So then you decided you required a publicity agent to keep your name and all of this out of the papers. How did you happen to pick on me, Mr. Cumming?”

The white-haired philanthropist smiled wryly.

“I’d just been glancing through a legal newspaper and saw that you were in some financial trouble. I thought—frankly, that you’d need money badly enough to help me.”

HOLLISTER screwed up his courage, turned and took a good look at the corpse. After it stopped swaying—In Hollister’s eyes and brain—he realized that the most outstanding thing about the dead man was his shock of coal-black hair. It stood up on his head like the quills on a porcupine’s back. It rose up like wire. Otherwise, the man was of dark complexion. He had a thin mouth and coal

black eyes that were now filming over.

Hollister’s mind began working.

“It’s quite clear,” he said slowly, “that if we follow the usual procedure and report this to the police, nobody could keep your name out of the papers. Therefore, we can do but one thing. Put the body somewhere else.”

Cumming sighed.

“The very thing. Ever since it happened, I’ve tried to figure out some way, but I must have been stunned by this ghastly thing. Thank you, Mr. Hollister. You are earning your fee. But how can we dispose of the corpse?”

“Easy.” Hollister was remembering some crime movies. “We’ll cart the body to some other place, arrange it to look like suicide and then let the cops follow their usual routine. They’ll identify the man, of course. They always do. They’ll discover he was incurably ill and had no money.

“That ought to explain it. Suicide—and we don’t know the vaguest thing about it. No one knew he was coming here. If anyone did, you could tell the truth. Say you refused to help the man until you had investigated his statements.”

Cumming nodded.

“All right. I agree to that. Now—how do we get the body out of my home? Obviously, I can’t do it. If anything happened—if we were stopped for instance, the whole game would be up. It’s your job, young man. Tell you what—I’ll double that fee.”

“Thanks,” Hollister gulped. “Can I borrow your car? And something to—to wrap the corpse in. Can’t spill any blood or leave fingerprints. Gosh—no fingerprints.”

“I’ll arrange it,” Cumming said. “Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

He was gone five hours—in Hollister’s estimation—not the actual five minutes it took him to fetch an old blanket. Hollister took it and started for the corpse like a toreador goes

toward the bull. The blanket shook badly. Cumming touched his arm and extended a glass.

“Brandy,” he said, “I thought we’d both need some.”

Hollister drank it at a gulp, nearly blowing his head off as the powerful stuff lined his throat. At the time he thought he could write publicity about the soul-saving properties of brandy, better than anything he could write on any other subject.

He got the blanket around the man, picked up the gun at his feet and took care to use a handkerchief and handle the weapon very lightly. He stuffed this into his pocket. With Cumming’s help he carried the corpse through the house, across the dark rear yard and put it into the back seat of a car.

Two minutes later, he was driving off and wondering what in blazes he’d do with the body. A nice, dark, public park, a bench on which to seat the corpse and arrange things. That was it. Hollister wished he had another drink of brandy.

Headlights swept the deserted street. He turned a corner and the lights seemed to fasten upon a sign below a large mail box. The sign read: ANGUS McVICKER. At first, the name meant nothing and then Hollister automatically put his foot on the brake.

Angus McVicker. Old Scrooge! Perhaps it was the brandy, perhaps just a whimsical wave of sadism, but Hollister suddenly made up his mind. He stopped the car just beyond the house and looked back. The house was entirely dark. He backed up, turned into the driveway and throttling the engine very low, he rolled up to the spacious front porch.

There was no time to waste. He opened the car door, hauled out the body and found that he was so accustomed to it by now that he felt no more pangs of anguish than a slightly nervous embalmer. He carried the body onto the porch and carefully propped it

into a large rocker. He let the right hand dangle limply and put the gun on the porch floor just below the hand. He flipped away the handkerchief, stepped back and regarded his handiwork.

Then he groaned and moved back further. Something was happening to the corpse. His skull was coming off! That shock of wild, wiry hair was actually moving. It slid slowly down the side of his head and fell completely off.

If the corpse had risen and pointed an accusing finger at Hollister, he couldn’t have felt more alarmed. For a moment he was on the verge of rout. Only the soft impact of the wig on the porch floor brought back his senses.

He picked up the thing and tried to put it back on the dead man’s head. It wouldn’t stay there.

Hollister stuck the thing into his pocket and decided he’d better get going before he was seen. The wig didn’t matter.

He was afraid to start the car motor so he twisted the wheel to conform with the turning drive, got behind and pushed. When the car was rolling, he jumped in. There was a slight grade and he sailed through the gate, onto the street and took his foot off the clutch. The engine grabbed and he was traveling under power.

He took the car back to Cumming. The philanthropist was waiting for him.

“It’s taken care of,” Hollister said. “Don’t worry about a thing.”

CUMMING extended his hand. It held another thousand dollar bill. “Yours,” he said. “We agreed to double the fee, remember? If the body is found and there is no possibility of tying up the man’s death with me, then I shall forward you eight thousand more. Thank you, Mr. Hollister.”

Hollister made his way to a corner several blocks distant, suddenly recalled that

he was comparatively rich and hailed a taxi. He had himself driven all the way to the medium-priced hotel where he lived and only owed six weeks rent.

On his way in he stopped at the desk and paid up his account. He needed some smaller bills anyway. He whistled softly as the elevator whisked him up to his floor. Then he grinned. Somebody was going to be mightily surprised and he hoped it would cost him money. Hollister meant no one but Angus McVicker.

Safe in his own room, the full impact of what he'd done came back to him. Of course he had committed a crime but then he felt it was in a good cause. The dead man had spitefully killed himself. Cumming didn't deserve such treatment.

No, indeed. Cumming was the type of man who deserved a break. Hollister buoyed up his spirits with such thoughts. They needed buoying up. So much so, that he called the bar and ordered some drinks sent up.

These helped too and when he started for bed, his brain was reeling slightly. Until he thrust a hand into his coat pocket and hauled out the dead man's wig. His mind cleared like magic. He let go of it as if the thing was red hot. It hit the floor. Hollister frowned and picked it up. The thing was stiff. Wholly taken by curiosity, he examined the wig closer. It seemed to be composed of two parts. There was a slit through the substance that lay close to the head. Hollister pried this apart a little. Then he sat down with a thump. His fingers removed two bills. One was for ten thousand, while the other was a five-thousand-dollar bill.

Now he couldn't sleep at all. At first, he contemplated calling Cumming and telling him about it, but gave up the idea. It was better to wait and see what developed. Something told Hal Hollister it wouldn't be good.

In the early dawn he went out and bought all the newspapers on the stands so far.

Nary a one contained a word about the finding of a strange corpse on Angus McVicker's front porch.

At noon, he ventured out again. Hollister gave no thought about going to his office. Financial troubles were over, but what took their place was a thousandfold worse. The noon papers, facetiously labeled as early evening editions, carried a small item. The corpse of a man, shot through the heart, had been discovered on the shore of the East River. The police stated that it was hardly suicide because the man had been shot through the heart and was dead before being dumped near the water.

Hollister wondered just how much a man could perspire and still live. He thought he'd about reached his capacity. Very resolutely, he told himself that life must go on. If he didn't show up at the office, someone might ask questions.

He took a taxi, traveling in style. The meter ticked comfortably for the first time in Hollister's career. He had money. Plenty of it, but what in the world he'd do with that fifteen thousand—and the wig it came in—he didn't know. He smiled somewhat complacently though. Old Angus wouldn't ride a cab like this.

"Angus!" he shot the word out of his mouth. Old Angus had carried the body to the shore and merely dumped it down. Why? Why in the name of every green molded nickel he nursed, would McVicker do such a thing.

And why would the dead man have appealed to Cumming for help if he carried fifteen grand in his hair? Hollister's life was suddenly a confused jumble again.

Half an hour after he reached his office, a messenger delivered a plain envelope and took his receipt. Automatically, Hollister ripped it open. Money fell out. Eight bills! It was coming at him from every direction. This was Cumming's final payment. All eight thousand dollars were there as well as a typed,

unsigned note, stating, neatly, that the writer was well satisfied with Hollister's services, appreciated same and payment was enclosed. Hollister burned that note.

Tony Arnold came in soon after and Hollister forced himself to straighten out. Arnold took one look at him, sighed and sat down.

"You're taking it tough, Hal. I wish there was something I could do. Cumming didn't come through! I can tell by just looking at you."

Hollister passed over some money. "He came through handsomely only the old boy kept me up all night with his plans. How that man hates publicity. He's paying me to see that his name stays out of the papers. On a yearly basis too. What a client!"

Arnold folded the money and wrote out a receipt for it. He passed over the slip of paper. "I wish Angus was in today," he said. "I'd like to see his face when I hand him this dough and tell him it's from you. Ever see him? No, I doubt it. Angus never sees anyone. Even has a private elevator and entrance. He's sour-faced. Why that man would curdle potted cheese. Well, I'm glad you're on the beam again, Hal. May your good luck keep up."

"No," Hollister shouted. Then he realized what he'd said. "I mean yes, of course. Thanks, Tony. I'm grateful. Maybe you brought me luck."

UNCOMFORTABLY Hollister shivered as Arnold went out. He locked the door, went back to his desk and sat there for two hours. His mind was full of strange ideas. Men who begged for money and carried a small fortune in their wigs. Tight-fisted millionaires who found corpses on their front porches and promptly dumped them down by the river. It was all very confusing.

But something had to be done. Hollister was, oddly enough, honest. That fifteen grand belonged to someone else. He

had to find out who the dead man was, first of all. That was essential. But if the cops couldn't identify him, how could he?

More and more, he thought about McVicker. Perhaps the old scrooge knew the man. Perhaps he'd come to Angus and tried to beg and McVicker believed he'd taken questionable revenge by knocking himself off on the front porch. Cumming had experienced that feeling. It was natural that McVicker would too. And he was too tight to hire someone to ditch the corpse. The answer seemed to lie with Angus McVicker. Perhaps he could furnish the identification, if he was sure he wouldn't be involved with the police.

Certainly, the old tightwad was under some mental anguish. Little short of a fatal illness would have kept him away from his office for even one day. Hollister made up his mind. He seized the telephone, shoved it back and reached for the phone book until he had the number of Angus McVicker's residence. He dialed it.

"I wish to talk to Mr. McVicker about something vitally important," Hollister told the woman who answered. She was obviously a maid because she called him "sir."

A harsh, half whining voice came on. Hollister said, "Mr. McVicker, I must see you very soon. Don't ask who I am, but it is in connection with what happened last night."

"Another one!" Angus' voice became completely a whine. "Well, I can't refuse, and listen to me, I didn't kill Dupree. I swear I didn't. He was dead when I found him. No one knows—"

"No one had better," Hollister said ominously. "I'll see you tonight—about ten. Be there—or else."

"I'll be here," Angus McVicker half sobbed. "Listen—I paid Dupree last night. Before he was k-killed. I can't pay again, I tell you. It's impossible. These days things aren't so good with me. Tenants don't pay their rent. I have to sue."

Those words stopped Hollister from blurting the whole truth over the phone. Let the old boy suffer a little. He and his non-paying tenants and his eviction suits! Driving a man to involuntary bankruptcy. He deserved to sweat. Hollister actually felt smug about the whole thing as he hung up.

Promptly at the specified hour, he was admitted to McVicker's home. Angus, himself, let him in and the dour old tightwad was wringing his hands when Hollister sat down and stared at him coldly.

"I did pay off last night," Angus said. "I swear I did. Why should Dupree come back and kill himself on my front porch?"

"How do I know you paid." Hollister was enjoying this.

Angus groaned dismally. "I did, but I can't prove it. I'll have to pay again even if it turns me into a pauper. If I pay, will you promise not to come here again for months?"

Hollister thought rapidly. Why not let Angus go through the exquisite agony of paying off? He shrugged. Angus, with a piteous cry, arose and went to a wall safe. He took out of it an enormous stack of new, crisp currency, counted twenty-five like a man who counts his last heartbeats and—placed twenty-five thousand dollars in Hollister's hands.

"Now go," McVicker wailed. "Get out of here and don't let me see you again. Fifty thousand it cost me this time just because Dupree decided to kill himself. I'm a broken man."

Hollister arose slowly, not quite knowing what to do about all this. It suddenly occurred to him that Dupree had been a blackmailer, that Angus was paying off handsomely and perhaps Cumming had paid off too.

Hardly thinking, Hollister stuffed the money into his pocket. He decided not to tell McVicker anything at the moment. He first had to be sure about several things. One was the positive identity of the corpse found down

by the river. The other was more important. Had Cumming murdered Dupree?

Hollister started across the porch. A man was coming toward him. They passed and the man gave him a sharp glance. Sharp enough to make Hollister shudder. Maybe this was another of the blackmail gang. It was best that he get away as promptly as possible. The man was burly, harsh-looking and Hollister hadn't liked his peculiar stare.

Hollister took a taxi to the City Morgue. There, on pretext of looking for a missing relative, he was escorted through the ice box. Hollister got himself another case of jitters. Then a slab was rolled out, a sheet raised and the body of Dupree revealed. His bald pate glistened dully. Hollister shivered and not from the dankness of the morgue either.

"I—I don't see the man I want," he said weakly. "I—I've had enough of this. L—let me out."

"Sure, pal," a heavy voice said behind him. "We'll let you out after you answer a couple of questions."

Hollister turned and faced the burly man he'd encountered on his way out of McVicker's house. Now the man held a leather case in one hand and Hollister was almost blinded by the meaning of the gold shield it contained.

"Detective Lieutenant," Hollister read as if it were his own name on a tombstone.

"Valentine is the name," the detective said. "Headquarters Squad. I saw you come out of Angus McVicker's house. What were you doing there?"

PANIC-STRICKEN Hollister swallowed with some difficulty.

"Oh—that. Why, Angus McVicker is my landlord. I rent an office in his building and I went there to tell him I'd paid some back rent to his manager. You can check up. So long, Lieutenant. Nice to have met you."



One single step Hollister took before that huge hand descended on his shoulder and stopped him.

"That's funny," Valentine said. "McVicker told me you were an insurance salesman. Come on, pal, what's it all about?"

Hollister looked around the morgue and wondered if they'd put him here too, after he had been electrocuted for a murder he didn't commit.

"L—look," he said weakly, "I can talk better in more cheerful surroundings."

Valentine grinned.

"Sure—my office is a very romantic place. It's got a desk, some chairs and a lot of privacy. Also, I keep a string of nice cells in the same building. Remember that."

Valentine took him to Headquarters in a police car, closed the door of his office and sat down. He looked directly at Hollister.

"All right—shoot. What do you and your gang have on Angus McVicker? Why would he crash through with blackmail dough? And, incidentally, lift your arms. I haven't given you a frisk yet."

He pulled out the twenty-five one-thousand bills Angus had given him. He found the fifteen one thousand dollar bills which had come from a dead man's wig. He discovered nine thousand in one-thousand-dollar bills—Cumming's fee for service rendered.

"Just small change." Hollister offered with what he hoped was a grin. It didn't work. Valentine threw the money on his desk and stuck his nose an inch from Hollister's face.

"Come through," the police officer said ominously. "I'll tell you this much. We were looking for Dupree when he was found near the river. Dupree had passed a one grand bill in a bar and the guy who took it thought it might be phony so he called us. It was really all right and we traced the bill from a bank to Angus McVicker."

Hollister sat down.

"Look, Lieutenant," he gulped, "I'm

coming clean. That's the lingo you use here, isn't it? Give me a break."

Hollister was looking at the thousand-dollar bills strewn across the detective's desk.

"What sort of a break?" Valentine demanded. "Anyway, it's up to the D.A. to bargain, but I'll put in my two cents worth if you talk."

"Your promise is good with me," Hollister said. "First off, take me to my apartment. Then we'll go to Cumming's. Yes, Clark Cumming. From there on, you'll have to work with me. Give me a full head of steam or I won't utter another word."

Valentine studied Hollister's purse and papers which he'd taken from him. He mulled over the idea for a moment, made a few phone calls concerning Hollister's alleged reputation and then agreed to his demands.

"And take along that money," Hollister said. "Give me fifteen thousand of it now. Then we're going to my apartment. I want to pick up Dupree's wig."

"Wig?" Valentine muttered. "Yeah, sure, and should I take along a straitjacket, my friend?"

"Just handcuffs," Hollister said grimly. "And they won't be for me."

Half an hour later, they were at Cumming's elaborate home, seated in his library and watching Cumming regard them with utter amazement.

"This man," Cumming pointed to Hollister, "claims I paid him to dispose of a corpse? Sheer nonsense. I never saw this man before in my life."

Valentine shrugged and got up.

"Come on, Hollister," he said. "I've had enough of these monkeyshines. The cell block is your next stop."

Cumming didn't move from his chair. Hollister bit his lip, wrenched himself free of Valentine's grasp and made a dash for Cumming. On his way he covertly thrust Dupree's wig under the chair in which the

corpse had been seated. Valentine got him before he reached Cumming. This time he put cuffs on his wrists.

“Sorry, Mr. Cumming,” Valentine apologized. “I didn’t think this rat had nerve enough to make a break. Stay right where you are. I know the way out.”

He yanked Hollister out of the house, but fumbled with the door a moment. He put him in the car, started the motor and drove about a hundred yards.

“Now what was the rest of the deal?” he asked.

Hollister came out of the doldrums.

“You mean I still get a break?”

“Listen,” Valentine said. “Cumming’s hands were wet on the palms. He’s scared stiff. A detective notices those things. I suppose you want to go back. Well, I fixed the door so it isn’t locked. Here—I’ll take those cuffs off you.”

Hollister slipped out of the car, ran back to the house and let himself in. He reached the library. It was empty, but the wig wasn’t under the chair any longer. All he hoped was that Cumming fully believed it had slipped off Dupree’s scalp when they were carrying him out.

Then Hollister saw one whole bookcase start moving. It was on rollers and pushed out. Cumming emerged from this hidden door and the secret room behind it. He saw Hollister, who had no chance to move. A gun appeared in Cumming’s fist and leveled.

CAUTIOUSLY Hollister raised his arms. “So it was you,” he said slowly. “I got away from the cop and came back because I figured you really had killed Dupree. Shall I tell you why? Because Dupree was part of a backmailing ring which you headed.

“As a great philanthropist, you were never suspected. Dupree held out. He’d just come from Angus McVicker’s and was supposed to have picked up twenty-five

thousand dollars. He said McVicker only gave him ten. You took this, knew he was holding out and let him have it. You searched him and found nothing—because the money was hidden in Dupree’s wig.”

“Have you finished?” Cumming asked quietly.

“No, not quite. You had to get rid of the corpse and it was too risky so you thought up a scheme to get me into it. I was your very delightful stooge. But Cumming, for a wealthy and intelligent man, you made a bad mistake. You paid me in one-thousand-dollar bills. You sent me eight more one-grand bills.

“I found fifteen thousand more, in similar bills, in Dupree’s wig. Later on, Angus handed me twenty-five more of those bills when he thought I was another member of your blackmail ring. All those bills were new, numbered in rotation and possession of them by you, proves you were in with Dupree.”

“Finished now?” Cumming asked. “Because I intend to finish you quite permanently, say you came back here to attack me and I shot you in self-defense.”

The gun steadied. Hollister braced himself and for some unaccountable reason he started to pray that the gun wasn’t loaded with dum-dums. He’d been reading about the way Japs fight. He was positive that he was dead and death was full of pleasant dreams when he saw Cumming slowly lower the gun and finally drop it.

Lieutenant Valentine came into focus.

“It worked nicely, Hollister,” he said.

“We’ve been looking for the head of a big blackmail ring for more than three years. Cumming is it.”

Hollister knelt on the floor first, then he sat and finally he stretched out. He wasn’t tired either.

Some time later, Hollister glanced at bold headlines, got up from the uncomfortably hard pallet of his cell and went to the barred door. Across from him was Angus McVicker

wringing his hands and wishing he'd made some of his money the honest—and hard—way. Next door to Hollister's cell was Cumming.

Hollister passed the newspaper to him.

"Cumming," he said. "I failed you. The money you paid to keep your name out of the papers is yours again, naturally. I can't accept it because I failed to keep your name out of the papers. You can pick up the ten thousand from Lieutenant Valentine. I'm certain he'll be glad to act as my agent in the matter."

"I hope they give you a hundred years," Cumming roared.

Hollister grinned.

"I'm going to be let out pretty soon. They just want me here as a material witness. Valentine says I'll be forgiven for removing Dupree from your house because I've been a good boy and I talked. It's a great life, Mr.

Cumming. Yesterday I was broke and bankrupt. Then, almost as fast as I could handle it, I became rich. A thousand from you, then a second thousand. Then fifteen from Dupree, then eight more from you. Finally, twenty-five thousand from Angus, who was in on the racket as a go-between. Money slips through my fingers, but I like being broke. You don't have worries. Hey, Angus, how are you feeling?"

Angus McVicker peered through the bars. "Very hungry. Do they ever feed a man in here?"

"They certainly do," Hollister said. "Not bad food either."

"Without charge?" McVicker inquired.

"It's all on the town," Hollister assured him.

Angus sat down.

"Ah well, there is always a ray of sunshine amidst a man's troubles."