

KILLER'S CURE

To win a girl's confidence Dan Turner turns actor. He should have known from the first that Hollywood is full of actors—and actresses



"Stiffen him," Brett said, I bellowed like a foghorn.



By ROBERT
LESLIE BELLEM

A Dan Turner
Story

THE red-haired wren was soaking drunk. It was shortly before midnight when I tabbed her staggering out of the Beche-de-Mer, a high grade grog shop on McCadden Place to the north of Hollywood Boulevard, and she was so bottled she couldn't have hit the sidewalk with a handful of soybeans.

I was sitting in my parked jalopy, piping her tipsy progress toward a swanky limousine farther down the block. It was a fifty-fifty bet whether she'd reach the gaudy chariot or fall kerplunk on her gorgeous features—a possibility that might knock all my plans into a cocked hat. I crossed my mental fingers and hoped she would remain perpendicular at least long enough for me to do my stuff.

And then a harness cop made for her. He came from the blackness of a nearby parking lot and he looked as mean as a stomach ulcer if you can imagine a stomach ulcer six feet tall and thin as a bed-slat.

Hunched beside me in my coupe, Mike Brett quivered with sudden tension as he lamped the lanky bluecoat approaching the saturated doll. "Ready, Sherlock?"

I said: "Just about," and gave him a reassuring grin. Brett was a little guy, gray at the temples, narrow of profile, and as sharp as a tack where brains were concerned. He had to be smart to hold down his job as production mogul of Superscreen Studios, but for once in his career he was up against a problem he couldn't cope with. That was why he'd hired

me.

“Better start moving,” he said through his clenched grinders. “This is it.”

“Okay,” I told him. “You scram home. I’ll phone you as soon as I learn anything.”

He sighed, wished me luck and furtively powdered.

WHEN he’d vanished from view, I slipped out from under my wheel and ankleed across to where the uniformed bozo was informing the red-haired chick she was under arrest.

“Under arrest?” she gasped. The news seemed to sober her. “But—but wh-why?”

“Public drunkenness,” he rasped nastily.

That was my cue to horn in. I barged close to the lug; hung the vinegar focus on him and said: “Are you accusing this frail of being fried?”

“Yeah. Blow, bub. Keep your beak out of it.”

“Oh,” I sneered. “A Cossack, hunh?”

He tipped me a quick wink to let me know he was all set for what was going to happen next. He kept his tone ugly and his map sullen, though. “I said blow. I meant it. Go on, roll your hoop, or I’ll pinch you along with the jane.”

“That’s what you think,” I grated. Then I spooned him a bop on the mush; pretended to put my full hundred and ninety pounds into the poke. Actually I pulled the zing out of it just before I connected.

You wouldn’t have guessed this, however. The guy rocked dizzily, lost headway and collapsed like a punctured tire; spilled his lanky length on the pavement and lay as motionless as an amputated finger. Which was exactly what he was being paid to do, only I kept that knowledge to myself. At this stage of the game it wouldn’t be wise to tell the red-haired cupcake it was all a phony setup for her especial benefit.

Instead, I fastened the grab on her arm; hauled her over to the parked limousine. “Is

this your buggy, babe?”

“Y-yes. But—but I—I’m afraid I’m in no condition to drive. I m-mean—”

“Skip it, hon. Pile in before that flatfoot wakes up and begins blowing the whistle on us.” I boosted her into the tonneau, slid my own heft beneath the steering wheel up front. “Where do you live?”

She mumbled an address in Westwood Hills. Then, as I thumbed the starter button on the dashboard and got the crate into rapid motion, she added: “I’m Nora Hanford.”

I made with the counterfeit amazement. “Not Nora Hanford the Superscreen star!”

“Yes.”

A GRIN wanted to crease my puss but I repressed it: I could have told her plenty about herself if I’d felt like it; such as the fact that Mike Brett was her boss, that she was in a jam of some sort, and that Brett had hired me to find out the nature of the trouble. His own efforts to pump her had failed dismally so he’d called me in on the mess.

I said: “Gosh, Miss Hanford, I hope you won’t think I butted into your personal affairs when I slugged that cop.”

“I’m grateful to you,” she forgave me. “But tell me. Why did you slug him?”

“Because you didn’t look like a jessie that belongs in jail,” I said simply. “Besides, I hate policemen.”

“Hate p-policemen? I don’t understand. Do you mean you’re a c-crook or something?”

“That depends on how you look at it,” I said. “I’m a private dick. Dan Turner is the handle.”

She drew an audible breath, sharply startled. “A private detective! I hadn’t thought of th-that.” Then she came clambering into the front compartment; straddled the seat-back and dropped down alongside me. “Maybe y-you can help me!” she whispered.

I played stupid, although I knew I was about to get results. For the past month, something had been nibbling on this Hanford

quail; a worry she'd refused to discuss with Mike Brett or take up with the cops. She had preferred to keep it to herself, seeking solace by getting swacked each evening in various gin mills around town. In turn, this had affected her acting ability; she had ruined reel after reel of film in her latest Superscreen opus.

Finally Brett had engaged me to gain the cutie's confidence, make her spill. I dreamed up the scheme of hiring a bit player named Tommy Cuneo, dressing him in a police outfit from the studio's costume department, and having him go through the motions of making a pinch. By pretending to clout him crosseyed I figured I could put myself in solid with Nora Hanford; and now, sure enough, the deal was paying dividends.

I said: "What do you mean, maybe I can help you?"

"I'm in t-trouble."

"With that harness bull I bashed? Nuts."

Her lower lip got tremulous. "No, it's something worse than that; something I haven't dared tell anyone about. I—I wonder if I can trust you?"

"I've been trusted by experts, kitten. Whistle the tune." I kept the limousine aimed for Westwood.

She squared her dainty shoulders, ran jerky fingers through her wavy red coiffure. "Do you p-promise not to get me involved with the law?"

"I've already told you I hate cops."

"All right," she said faintly; and she began regaling me at length with the wildest story of killery and plundering I'd ever listened to. It sounded like a grade B melodrama, the brand they grind out on Poverty Row. Only this wasn't a movie. It was real, and Nora Hanford was in one hell of a jackpot.

I DROVE her to her hillside stash, told her to stay indoors and under cover until I could arrange for special protection for her. Then, borrowing her limousine because I'd left my

own bucket parked downtown, I made knots for Mike Brett's wigwam in Hollywoodland. Twenty minutes later I was on his porch.

The gray-thatched little Superscreen mogul opened up in person, almost the instant I shoved the button. He had Tommy Cuneo with him: the lanky hambo who'd played the role of harness bull in our spurious fracas on McCadden Place. Cuneo was now clad in civilian threads and counting a stack of geetus, his payoff for letting me take a punch at him. "Thanks, Mr. Brett," he was saying. Then, seeing me: "Hi! Did the act click?"

"Big," I nodded.

He looked as happy as if he'd just copped the Academy award. I waited until he waved good night and powdered; then I went inside with Brett. "I got the dope, Mike. It's bad."

"How bad?"

"The doll's life may be in danger. And her career is tottering on the brink of a terrific stench."

Brett's peepers slitted. "Give with the details."

"It goes back to Nora's early days in Chicago. She was hooked up with a hood, a small time grifter and gungsel."

"Married to him, you mean?"

"So to speak. Anyhow he drew a ten year rap on an armed robbery charge and Nora hauled hips to Hollywood, made an actress of herself; became one of your top stars. If it hadn't been for a lucky break, she might have faced arrest herself when this mobster got nabbed."

"Good God!"

I said: "So now we come to a month ago. There was a jewelry store heist here in town on the Sunset Strip; remember?"

He made a sour mouth. "I ought to remember. I own that shop. It was one of my investments, an anchor to windward in case the movie industry gets tired of me and boots me out on my rear. Do I remember the stickup, he asks me!"

I FASTENED the flabbergasted focus on him, although I don't know why I should have been astonished by the fact that he held ownership of a diamond emporium. Lots of big shots in the galloping tintypes conduct private business enterprises on the side—it's a Hollywood custom. You'll find famous names on many an antique store, millinery joint, and dress shop along, the Strip and in Beverly Hills; yet I was definitely startled that Mike Brett was the proprietor of this jewelry deadfall I'd mentioned. Somehow it meshed into the puzzle; or at least it seemed to.

"Okay," I said. "The heist was pulled by two masked hombres who got away with a mess of rocks worth a hundred grand or more. Unset stones for the most part."

"And not insured," Mike moaned. "The policy had expired and I'd forgotten to renew it. I stood the whole loss."

I tried to look sympathetic. "A shop clerk shot one of this masked pair, you'll recall; croaked him. The second thug made a clean getaway with the swag. That brings us back to the Hanford quail. Believe it or not, the hood who got bumped was her hubby from Chicago, the jailbird she'd left behind her."

"That's monstrous, Hawkshaw!"

"It gets rapidly worse," I said. "The day after the heist, a parcel came to Nora by express. With it was a note from the surviving stickup artist, who of course didn't identify himself by name. I've got the letter here."

"What does it say?" Mike asked me in a tight voice.

I read aloud:

"Dear Miss Hanford—

You don't know me but I was your husband's best pal, we crushed out of stir together in Illinois. Him and me pulled a little job on the Strip yesterday and he got rubbed out, maybe you saw it in the papers. So I got to lay low a while on account the law is pretty worked up, and if somebody ever found this hot ice on me I'd get the book throwed at me.

What I need is some place to hide the sparklers until the beef blows down and I can fence them for a chunk of moolah. You being a movie star, I figure you're a safe stash so I am sending them to you in this bundle. I know you won't stool to the cops or you would have to tell them you used to be a gun moll in Chi, which would ruin you in the movies. So keep quiet and your Chicago past won't never come out, but if you cross me up I will crucify you or maybe even croak you. Soon as it is okay I will contact you and take these rocks off of your hands and they better all be there, on account of I know exactly how many there is, I counted them.

"Yours, X.Y.Z."

Mike Brett's glimmers were standing out like two oysters on stalks when I finished reading the letter. "No wonder Nora's on edge, Hawkshaw! Why, she—she's been hanging onto those stones ever since my shop was robbed!"

"No," I said. "There's the rub. She's dreading the day when this anonymous blister shows up because that package was empty when she received it."

BRETT turned pallid around the fringes. "Empty? The diamonds weren't in the parcel?"

"So she claims."

"Well, then, where are they?"

I shrugged. "Maybe an express employee rifled the bundle; or one of Nora's own servants. It's a cinch she can't ask the cops to investigate."

"I see that. She'd have to confess her past connection with crooks. It would ruin her. The Hays office—"

"Yeah," I said. "But what's going to happen when this heist guy shows up and wants the sparklers? Will he believe her story that all she received was an empty parcel, or will he think she crossed him and went south with the swag?"

The Superscreen mogul balled his fists. "Good Lord! Suppose he carries out his threat, k-kills her? She's got to have protection, Philo." Then he lowered his tone. "Not merely a bodyguard, though!"

"Meaning what?"

"You know what I mean. A bodyguard might protect Nora against physical attack by this thug, but the thug wouldn't take it lying down. He'd probably get even by tipping the police of her past. That would finish her in pictures."

I broke out a gasper. "Well?"

"We've got to plant a man with her, a man who knows what to do with a gun."

I said: "In other words, when the hood shows up and demands the loot, you want him bumped."

"That's the only way to handle it," Brett said grimly. "And then we can claim he was killed while breaking and entering. The whole thing will be washed up."

"All except the question of what happened to the stolen diamonds," I blew a smoke ring.

"To hell with the diamonds. Nora's the one we've got to worry about. She means more to Superscreen than a hundred thousand dollars' worth of rocks mean to me. How about it? Will you take the job?"

I shook my head. "I'm a snoop, not an assassin."

"Oh, yellow, hunh? Okay. I know a man who isn't scared when he meets a gunsel: my jewelry store clerk who shot one of those two heist guys in the stickup. He'll be glad to get a chance at the other one."

I said: "Wait, Mike. You're planning a murder. Premeditated croakery is illegal in California. I can't let you do it."

He lifted a lip. "How do you figure to stop me?" Then, unexpectedly, he picked up a heavy bronze ash tray; whammed it full at my noggin. It bounced against my thatch with a boom you could have heard all the way to Santa Monica. I pitched headlong, slugged the rug with my smeller, and took a trip to

dreamland.

Just before unconsciousness overtook me, a sound edged past the roaring in my ears. It was Mike telephoning. "Roy Vanderson, please. Hello, Roy? This is Mr. Brett. I want you to go at once to this address I'm going to give you. Take your gun. Tell Miss Hanford I sent you. I'll call her now and let her know you're on your way. I'll be there myself presently. And Roy, this is what you're to do in case . . ." Then it all faded out like a dissolve shot and I passed into a coma.

I WOKE up in solid darkness with a knob on my scalp the size of a hockey puck. I lurched to my pins, used my pencil flash; saw I was still in Brett's igloo but the studio mogul himself was no longer on the premises. Which was a good thing for him. If I'd encountered him at that moment, I'd have twisted him into a pretzel.

As it was, I staggered to his cellarette; replenished my lagging vigor with a triple tippie of Vat 69 from his private stock. As soon as the liquid fire hit bottom, I felt better; blundered my way out of the stash and filled my bellows with the dampness of the night. Far below me the lights of Hollywood twinkled, no longer restrained by pessimistic dimout regulations. Somewhere down there my jalopy was parked, while here I stood practically marooned on a landscaped knoll without so much as a pogo stick. Nora Hanford's limousine was gone, of course; Mike Brett had taken it.

But in that case his own chariot ought to be in the garage behind the tepee, I figured. I tested the theory; found it correct and discovered a key in the ignition switch. Five seconds later I was driving hellity-bloop in the direction of Westwood and the Hanford wren's residence.

Lights were burning on the lower floor of her hillside hacienda when I got there. Moreover, her front portal was standing wide open; which caused an ugly hunch to go

slithering down my spine. I pelted to the porch thrust myself over the threshold; froze on the steps leading down into the sunken living room.

The shack was a shambles of overturned furniture and ripped upholstery. Directly beneath me stood the Brett bozo and another guy I guessed to be his pistol-packing jewelry clerk, Roy Vanderson. This Vanderson character looked more like a professional bouncer than a diamond salesman; he had the build of a grizzly bear, a bullet-shaped conk with the hair cropped short, and two of the prettiest cauliflower ears you ever piped outside a boxing arena.

It wasn't his tough appearance that curdled my clockworks, though. I was staring past him, glomming a petrified gander at something sprawled on the floor. This object was a figure that had been human and attractive not long ago, but now the gorgeousness was gone. Her red tresses mussed, her frock rumped, Nora Hanford lay glaring horribly at the ceiling without seeing it. She would never see anything again. Some filthy dastard had throttled the bejaspers out of her; crunched her throat and rendered her deader than canceled postage.

I CATAPULTED into the room; confronted Brett and Vanderson. "Okay. Which one of you rats cooled her?"

Brett glued the horrified hinge on me. "Are—are you crazy, Turner? We didn't—I mean neither of us could have—for God's sake, don't say such things!" He shivered visibly.

"I said it and meant it," I snarled back at him. "I'll even say it again. Which one of you bumped her?"

"You're insane!"

"Yeah, maybe. Or maybe when you maced me with that ash tray, you jolted some sense into my think-tank. Your store lost a hundred grand in sparklers with no insurance. Tonight, through me, you learned those rocks had

supposedly been sent to this Hanford frill. She denied receiving them, but perhaps you refused to believe it. Maybe you came here to force them out of her; recover them before the original stickup guy could show up. You brawled with her when she didn't produce. And you ended by sending her to her ancestors."

Brett's puss went pasty. "No! You're wrong. I swear—"

"Then what about this ape?" I swung around to the Vanderson hulk. "Maybe he was after the swiped ice and didn't mind a spot of homicide. After all, he's got one notch on his gat from killing a hood. That would be neat, huh? First he bumped the blister who used to be Nora's hubby; then he chills Nora herself. A family massacre."

The big lug's kisser opened and words blurted out, high and amazingly falsetto. "My gwacious! I never heard such a pack of dweadful lies!" he pouted. "I got here just about a minute before Mr. Brett awwived. I found Miss Hanford dead and I was just wunning out of the house when he stopped me. We both came back inside, and—"

"That's the truth, Sherlock," Brett said. "The first I knew about this murder was when Vanderson dashed out and told me. We haven't even had time to notify the police."

I favored them both with a scoffing sneer. "Horse chestnuts. Vanderson had probably just bumped her and you caught him as he was trying to make a getaway. Either that, or you'd been here before him, strangled the cutie and lammed; returning later as if it was your first visit."

"You're saying that for sheer spite," the grey-thatched movie executive railed. "You're trying to involve me because I hit you with an ash tray, knocked you cold. You damned vindictive heel!"

"So I'm a vindictive heel. All the more reason I should put the finger on you, especially since I'm convinced you're guilty. One side, bub, while I call headquarters."

"No. Wait. Think it over. Look at that plush-lined jewelry box on the floor. It's the one the thieves stole from my Sunset Strip shop and dumped their loot into when they pulled the job. That proves Nora told the truth about receiving a package from the surviving heist guy."

"I never doubted it."

HE went on: "Okay, it's empty. That's additional proof Nora never got the diamonds. And this room has been ripped to ruins; so has the rest of the house. There aren't any servants; apparently it's their night out. Can't you see what this means? Nora was visited by the holdup man. She couldn't give him the stones because she didn't have them. He throttled her and then searched the place, thinking the stuff was hidden somewhere—"

"It's a good theory," I growled. "And it could apply to you or this Vanderson slob as well as an anonymous thug. Either one of you could have choked her and frisked the joint. Or maybe you were in cahoots; did it together."

Brett's jaw jutted. "You're going to insist, eh?"

"Yeah."

He said: "Take him, Roy."

I made a dig for the .32 automatic I always carry in an armpit holster, but I was a split instant too slow. Vanderson came lumbering at me like an army tank; grabbed me. I freed one fist, nailed him a terrific mash on the brow. It didn't even jar him. He lifted me high in the air—which was something of an accomplishment inasmuch as I weigh a hundred and ninety and stand six feet plus. I bellowed like a foghorn.

Brett nodded thoughtfully. "Stiffen him, Roy. Then you and I will scam. Later if he tries to involve us, it will be his word against ours. We'll say we were never anywhere near here. Go on, give him what he deserves."

"It will be a gweat pweasure, Mr. Brett," the huge character lisped in his piping falsetto.

And he slammed me to the carpet with extreme violence. All the breath whooshed out of my lungs and I heard a popping noise I as my ribs tried to come loose from their moorings. Blackness gulped me. The last I remembered was feeling something hard and rectangular under my spine and hearing a door slam.

REGAINING consciousness was like waking up on a bed of busted bricks. I moaned, rolled over, lamped what I'd been lying on. It was the plush-lined jewel box, knocked out of kilter by the impact or my tonnage. Except for Nora Hanford's red-haired remnants I was alone in the igloo. Brent and Vanderson had taken it on the scam.

I sat up on my haunches; tentatively felt myself for dislocated bones. Finding none, I concluded I'd probably survive—not that I cared a hell of a lot one way or the other. My nooks and crannies were one tremendous pain, a condition aggravated by something I now spotted on the rug near me. Gasping, I prodded my blurry grey matter into high gear and tried to mesh the puzzle's jigsaw pieces together.

The process was painful and protracted. I finally got the answer, though. Then I teetered to my shanks, circled the defunct doll's remainders and made for a phone on the far side of this wrecked room; dialed police headquarters and asked for my friend Dave Donaldson of the homicide squad.

He wasn't there. It was his week to work the day shift, and I had to make a second call; this time to his home. Presently I heard his sleepy voice sullenly cursing; "What's the idea of disturbing—?"

"Quiet. Dan Turner yodeling. I'm up to my neck in a bumpery mess and I thought you'd like the doubtful honor of making the nab."

His tone got wide awake in a thundering yank. "Huh? Turner? A murder case? For Pete's sake why can't you be like ordinary

private snoops and handle nice clean divorce jobs or trace guys that don't pay their bills? Why do you always have to get mixed up with homicides?"

I said: "Stow it. The deceased jane is Nora Hanford, the Superscreen star. Her past caught up with her and strangled her to glory, based on a batch of stolen sparklers."

Dave called loudly on heaven to witness that a policeman's life is not a happy one. "What's the inside dope?" he screeched. "Who gets pinched and why?"

"You might put a radio tracer on Mike Brett, production manager of Superscreen," I suggested. "Also on a large loogan name of Roy Vanderson, a jewelry clerk. Not that you'll find them at home, though. They're probably out framing an alibi. Wait; I'll tell you where to meet me so we can clean this up."

ILET him hang on while I riffled the pages of the telephone book. Finding what I wanted, I said: "Here it is. Be at this address as fast as you can ramble." I gave him the street number I'd located in the directory and then rang off before he launched a fleet of useless questions at me.

Whereupon, with a final glance at the murdered cupcake, I glipped outdoors and looked for a vehicle. Brett's chariot, which I'd driven here, was gone; but in its place he had left the Hanford doll's limousine. I glommed it, souped a charge of ethyl into its mechanism, and made knots.

Donaldson hadn't yet arrived when I dragged anchor in front of a certain shabby-genteel apartment wikiup on Yucca Street; but his official sedan blammed into view not more than three minutes subsequently. He piled out, came slanting toward me. "All right, hot shot. Speak your piece and make it plausible."

I fed him a succinct synopsis as we barged indoors and up a flight of uncarpeted steps. Then, nearing a closed door, I whispered: "Here we are at the payoff—I hope."

"You mean Vanderson lives here? Or is it some secret hideout Mike Brett uses when he yearns to be alone?"

"Neither," I said, and hit the portal a hell of a lick with my shoulder. This battering ram tactics splintered the woodwork, unshipped the hinges. I went brawling into a shoddy flat; piped the murderer standing in the middle of the room with a bewildered expression on his pan.

"Hey!" he yeped.

"Lift the flippers, Tommy Cuneo," I snarled at the lanky extra player who'd enacted the role of phony harness bull earlier in the scenario. "The jig's up. Consider yourself pinched for bumpery."

HE TRIED to side-step me but I grabbed him, shoved him over to Donaldson for the handcuffs. "What's the idea?" he demanded as he felt the nippers snicking on his wrists.

"You chilled Nora Hanford," I said. "And you're one of the two guys that stuck up Mike Brett's diamond shop on the Sunset Strip."

"That's screwy talk!" he caterwauled. "You—I—"

I fired up a coffin nail, leered at him through a cloud of fumes. "It's sensible talk," I contradicted him. "It comes from a process of elimination."

"Meaning what?"

"Somebody sent that jewelry box to the Hanford gazelle for safe keeping, not intending to get it back until the heat died down. Ordinarily, tonight would have been much too soon to demand it from her; yet someone went to her stash an hour or so ago and throttled her when she couldn't produce the glommed diamonds."

"So what?" he blustered.

"So the guilty guy must have had a strong reason for trying to recover his loot from Nora on this particular night. I asked myself what that reason was, and the answer was obvious. The killer had learned that I'd been called in

on the case to find out what was worrying Nora Hanford.

"That made it necessary for this heist artist to get the sparklers back from her before I beat him to the punch. Well, who knew I was taking a hand in the game? Nora did, but she's defunct. Mike Brett knew it; he's the one who hired me. But it wasn't likely he'd jeopardize his position in Hollywood, bump his ace star, for the sake of some stolen sparklers."

Cuneo sneered. "Naturally you'd front for Brett since he's paying your fee."

"Cash never influences me," I lied piously. "As a matter of fact, I suspected Brett and Vanderson, his jewelry clerk. But after I thought it over I realized there was one other guy who was hep to my working on the case. That bozo was you, the very slob we'd hired to impersonate a cop!"

"You've got nothing on me. Not a thing."

"Correction, please. You're the one character with opportunity and possible motive. As soon as Brett paid you off for wearing a bull's uniform, you went straight to Nora's joint and hung the permanent chill on her. I wouldn't be surprised if you have the stolen gems on you right now. Frisk him, Dave."

Donaldson nodded heavily; fanned his prisoner. "Whew!" he exclaimed as he fished a handful of loose diamonds from Cuneo's pocket. "Look what I found!"

"It's a plant!" the lanky Cuneo bleated. "A lousy frame! I didn't get those stones from Miss Hanford! The box was empty, I tell you!

I searched every inch of her place after I choked—oh-h-h, my God!" he whispered as he realized he'd spilled his beans.

I said: "So you confess you choked her. That's swell. It's just what I hoped you would do. You see, that jewel box was a trick affair; a gadget. It had a false bottom and a patent trap arrangement worked by a trigger. Pressing the trigger dumped the contents into the secret bottom, leaving the upper section completely empty."

"Why, you lousy—"

"When you put your swag in the box and sent it to Nora, the express company must have jounced it and tripped the trigger. That dropped the stones to the bottom, so she never even knew she had them."

His optics bulged. "They—you mean they were in—?"

"All the time," I nodded. "I myself found them by accident. I got flung to the floor and landed on the gadget, busting it and spilling the baubles. So I brought them here and put them in your pocket just now, thereby tricking you into a confession. Clever, hunh?"

He turned to Donaldson. "Take me away. I know when I'm licked." And Dave hauled him forth on the first leg of a journey ending at San Quentin, where they cured him of his kill-habit by installing him in the gas chamber.

Meanwhile I returned the stolen rocks to Mike Brett and collected a reward for my labors. Then, later, I hunted up Roy Vanderson and trounced hell out of him.