

# Blood On The Ice

*By Anthony Clemens*

## *A Short Story With A Punch*

**M**IKE MONK had decided to kill the thin man with the sharp nose the moment he got his first glimpse of the diamond.

Monk knew a diamond when he saw it, and there was no doubt in his mind that this was the real McCoy.

It was in the Greek restaurant on Tenth Avenue that he reached the decision to add another murder to the long list of crimes for which he had never been punished since his early days in South Africa.

It was those early days of his, spent at the Kimberley mines, which had developed in him the latent, ruthless instinct of the killer. He had thrived for a while as an illicit diamond buyer until his inevitable arrest. The murder of the two officers who had him in custody, then a swift flight to the coast, and a voyage as a stowaway in a tramp steamer bound for San Francisco had brought Mr. Michael Monk to America.

His lesson was learned—"Dead men tell no tales." Following that motto, he had worked his way across the continent, living well on the proceeds of periodical crimes which he committed, always acting in accordance with his slogan. He spent his money lavishly, living well until it was gone, then he would look around for further pickings.

This was one of the times when he was broke, forced to reduce his style of living until he replenished his funds. When he saw the diamond, he knew that he was going to be on easy street again.

He had just come into the restaurant and

seated himself near the door. The thin man, with two others, was seated at a table further down toward the rear of the restaurant, and he had his back to Monk. At first Monk paid no attention to the three, for he was occupied with the pork chops he had ordered.

Suddenly, he stopped with a forkful of food halfway to his mouth. Something had tinkled on the table at which the three men were sitting, and his eye caught the sparkle of a stone.

Slowly, thoughtfully, he conveyed the food to his mouth. His eyes were glued to that table. For the sparkle was the sparkle of a diamond, and it had come out of a small tobacco pouch which one of the two men had just handed to the thin man with the sharp nose.

Monk lowered his eyes quickly as the man who had handed over the pouch looked around the restaurant to note if they had been observed.

Presently Monk raised his eyes again, and saw that the three men were earnestly engaged in conversation; that is, two of them were talking to the thin man who was examining in the palm of his hand the contents of the tobacco pouch, which he had brought out. Monk could not see what those contents were, for the thin man's back was to him; but he could guess. He had seen one sample.

He gulped the balance of his food, his shrewd ruthless eyes narrowed almost to pinpoints. He strolled outside, after paying his check, with every appearance of carelessness.

He crossed the street, walked a few steps, and ducked into the darkened doorway of a

store. His eyes sought the lighted front of the restaurant across the street, and he watched for the thin man to come out. Monk's long, gaunt face, half illuminated by the light of the street lamp further down, was like that of a predatory wolf, without a flicker of mercy in his opaque eyes.

He had not long to wait. Within a few minutes the thin man with the sharp nose appeared in the doorway of the restaurant in company with the other two men. There was no parting or handshaking among them. The two men turned and walked west, without looking back, while the thin man started in the opposite direction, passing directly across the street from where Monk waited.

Monk allowed him to get a little way ahead, then left the concealment of the doorway and followed him, keeping on the other side of the street. It was after ten. The meat packing establishment and the warehouses that lined the street were closed at this time of night. Few pedestrians were about. The stage was set for Monk to make a coup. He felt that the devil was taking care of his own.

Two blocks east, Monk's quarry turned south, and in the middle of the block entered a cigar store. Monk crossed the street, and casually peered into the window of the cigar store as he passed. The thin man had entered a telephone booth.

Apparently the thin man's conversation was very short, for he was out in less than two minutes. Once more the chase resumed. This time the thin man walked north a block and then turned east again. Monk realized that he must be headed for the subway station, and decided he had better make his try for the diamonds before they got into a more populous district.

**H**E hastened his steps, and caught up to the other at the next corner. Already he

had transferred the snub-nosed automatic which he carried in his shoulder holster to the right hand pocket of his coat. He held this now, with the muzzle bulging toward the unsuspecting man in front of him. They were passing through a darkened section of the city which was quite lively during the day, but was deserted at this time of night.

Monk's teeth showed in a wolfish smile as he came almost abreast of his quarry. His thumb snicked off the safety catch of the automatic. It would have to be a quick job, one shot in a vital spot; then snatch the pouch out of the left hand pocket of the man's coat where he saw it bulge—and a quick getaway.

To hold the man up at the point of a gun, or to knock him out without killing him, never occurred to Monk. It was not in his code to leave a victim alive who might possibly later identify him.

The automatic was halfway out of his pocket, when suddenly he stiffened, relaxed his grip on it and dropped it back into his pocket. For a radio car had just swung around the far corner and was coming down the street toward them. A cold sweat broke out all over him as he realized how closely he had come to being captured in the act of committing murder.

He dropped a few paces back, walked more slowly, and went through the motions of lighting a cigarette. The squad car moved slowly down the street. He watched the distance between himself and his quarry widen more and more. The thin man was close to the corner now, whence the light of the subway station showed.

Monk cursed the two men in the radio car, hoping they would hurry a little. Even at that, he reflected, there would be no sense in going through with it at this time.

The officers in the squad car would hear the report of the shot even from around the corner.

He glanced behind, saw that the police car had turned off into the cross street, and hastened his footsteps. But the thin man was already on the way down into the subway station.

Monk's lips compressed tightly. He hurried after the other, and ran down the stairs.

A train was just pulling out of the station. Several people had come off the train and were leaving.

Monk's man had just passed through the turnstile.

Monk produced a nickel, put it in the slot, and went through also. This was a local station, which was fortunate.

The thin man had walked down toward the left, and Monk followed him. There was no one left on the platform; but Monk, who was always careful in matters which might involve the electric chair, noted that the agent in the change booth on the opposite platform could see everything that was happening.

His eyes became cloudy and furious at the thought that he was to be balked of his prey.

But he suddenly started to smile when he saw that the thin man had turned in at the entrance to the men's room just off the platform.

Monk clucked with satisfaction, and his hand went into his pocket, fondled the automatic. His quarry had obligingly done the only thing which would make it possible for him to carry out his crime.

Monk waited for almost a minute, then when he heard the rumble of an approaching express train, which would not stop at the station, he quickly pulled open the door of the men's room and stepped inside.

The thin man was on his way out when Monk came in. Monk had his automatic out, and the thin man's eyes opened in startled surprise, his hand flashing toward his armpit. But it never got there.

For Monk, with a cold, set smile on his face, pulled the trigger of his automatic once. The sound of the shot was drowned in the rumble of the express train which was passing at the moment.

The thin man was hurled backward by the force of the shot, and hit the cement floor with a sickening thud.

Monk's face betrayed no emotion as he knelt beside the dead man. He was careful to keep his hands away from the region of the other's heart, where the coat, vest, and shirt were rapidly being stained a deep crimson. Quickly his hands sought the side pocket, and emerged gripping the leather tobacco pouch.

Now, callously, with the dead man lying there on the floor, Monk poured out the contents of the pouch into his hand.

Diamonds! Big ones, little ones! They sparkled and shone and gleamed underneath the incandescent light; and Monk's eyes glittered no less than the precious stones which he held in his hands—glittered with greed.

At the bottom of the pouch there was a crumpled clipping from a newspaper. Monk nodded to himself in satisfaction as he read the item.

It had been circled in green ink, and the part contained in the circle read as follows:

The loot of the recent Bronson robbery has not yet been recovered. The police do not expect that it will soon appear on the market, for the perpetrators of the crime know very well that every fence in the city is being closely watched. There is no doubt that they will remove the valuable stones from their settings in order to make it easier to dispose of them. But the larger of the stones are so distinctive in shape that it would be impossible to sell them to anyone unless they were recut. In the meantime the Harrigan Detective Agency, acting against the advice of the police, has offered a reward of fifteen thousand dollars, *no questions asked*, for the return of the stones. Mr. Harrigan, upon being interviewed, said defiantly that as long as the police had been unable to do anything for him, he would try to recover the stones by this means.

Monk poured the diamonds back into the tobacco pouch, and pocketed it together with the clipping. He opened the door of the men's room a crack, peered out onto the platform. One or two people were now waiting there, and Monk heard the rumble of an incoming local train. He slid out of the men's room onto the platform just as the train pulled into the station. He did not even spare a single backward glance at the still body of the man he had killed.

**H**E boarded the train and sat in one of the corner seats, considering the situation.

The man he had left back there in the men's room was probably one of those who had robbed the Bronson store. Perhaps they had found it so difficult to dispose of the stones that they had finally decided to accept Harrigan's offer of fifteen thousand dollars reward and no questions asked. That was probably where the thin man was going. Monk smiled grimly. No questions asked meant—no questions asked. He knew Harrigan well enough to know that he would live up to the promise.

It didn't matter who brought those stones in, Harrigan would pay the reward; he had a reputation for keeping his word. And fifteen thousand dollars in cash was safer than trying to fence the hot stones.

Monk was on an uptown train. He got out at Forty-second Street, and walked two blocks west. He knew that Harrigan's office was in the theatrical district, knew that it would be open all night. He also knew that Harrigan would be there, for he was one of those detective agency heads who lived, breathed, and ate with their business.

He found the place quickly, and mounted the one flight of rickety stairs which led to the first floor office of the Harrigan Detective Agency.

The night man at the switchboard looked at him questioningly when he inquired for Harrigan, and asked, "Is he expecting you?"

Monk hesitated a moment. He had his hand in his pocket again, on the automatic. There was one thing that he must be sure of. He said, "You ought to know, guy. Isn't he expecting someone?"

"Like who?"

"Didn't you get a call just a few minutes ago?" Monk asked.

The operator shook his head, "Nope. No calls in the last half hour."

Monk sighed in relief. He had feared that the thin man's telephone call might have been to this office, and that the thin man might have given his name. In that case, he would have been in a jam, and was fully prepared to shoot his way out if necessary.

He said cheerfully, "Okay, guy. You tell Mr. Harrigan that there's a gentleman out here to see him."

Apparently the agency had numerous visitors such as Monk. For the operator did not seem to think it strange that he did not give his name. He plugged the wire into the switchboard and announced, "There's a gentleman here to see you, Mr. Harrigan."

He looked up at Monk. "Go right in, mister. He'll see you right away."

**M**ONK went in through the little wooden gate beside the switchboard, and rapped on the glass paneled door of the private office.

A deep voice boomed out, "Come in."

Monk opened the door and entered the private office.

Harrigan was sitting at a desk littered with papers, facing the door. He was big, powerful, husky-shouldered, with a heavy shock of brownish hair that was already turning gray at the temples.

Monk smiled when he saw the heavy

revolver which lay on the desk close to Harrigan's hand. He said, "You never take any chances, do you, Mr. Harrigan?"

The big agency executive frowned. "I don't know you," he said brusquely, "and I'm busy as hell. What can I do for you?"

Monk came close to the desk. "Got any dictographs here any place?" he asked.

Harrigan glowered. "If you've heard about me, you'll know I don't do business like that! You can talk all you want in here. There's no one to hear you but me."

Monk nodded. "I know that." He took the newspaper clipping from his pocket, threw it on the desk. "Is that true, what it says, that you're paying fifteen grand for the Bronson stones?"

Harrigan cast only a single glance at the piece of paper with the item circled in green. He looked up across the desk at Monk, studying him thoughtfully a moment, then said, "That's true. The cash is ready. What about it?"

"And no questions asked?"

Harrigan nodded slowly. "And no questions asked."

Monk pushed his questions eagerly. "And when does the fifteen grand get paid?"

"The cash is ready, and will be paid the moment the stones are handed over and counted."

Monk sighed with relief. "I know you're a man of your word, Mr. Harrigan. Not that I have anything to worry about, because I had nothing to do with the Bronson robbery. It so happens I found these stones. I saw that clipping in the paper and figured they were the Bronson swag, so I cut the clipping out and came here."

Harrigan said quietly, "You have the stones?"

For answer, Monk put his hand in his pocket and took out the leather tobacco pouch. He dropped it on the desk in front of Harrigan.

"Take a look."

Slowly, without taking his eyes off Monk, Harrigan undid the string at the top of the tobacco pouch and turned it upside down. The stones poured out on the glass-topped desk, sparkled in the electric light.

Monk started to say, "I suppose the gang that stole those stones must have been intending to come here to collect the reward. Somehow or other they must have lost the pouch. It's a lucky thing for me I found it."

"Yes," said Harrigan slowly. His right hand moved in a motion so fast that Monk did not realize what was happening until he found himself staring into the muzzle of a heavy, revolver which Harrigan had picked up from the desk.

Harrigan's lips were tightly compressed and his eyes were flashing dangerously. "Yes," he repeated slowly. "It's a lucky thing for you all right—not!"

Monk's face went pale. "What do you mean?" he asked shakily.

There was an edge to Harrigan's voice as he said, "What I mean is just this—that the last time I saw this clipping—" he tapped the crumpled piece of newspaper with the forefinger of his left hand, while he kept the gun steadily aimed at Monk's chest, "it was in the possession of one of my own operatives. He was going to make contact with the gang tonight and pay over the fifteen thousand dollars in return for the Bronson swag. I'm going to hold you right here, my friend, until I find out what you did to that operative of mine to make him give up these stones and the clipping!"

Monk felt his knees snaking as he read his own inevitable doom in the eyes of the stern old agency head.