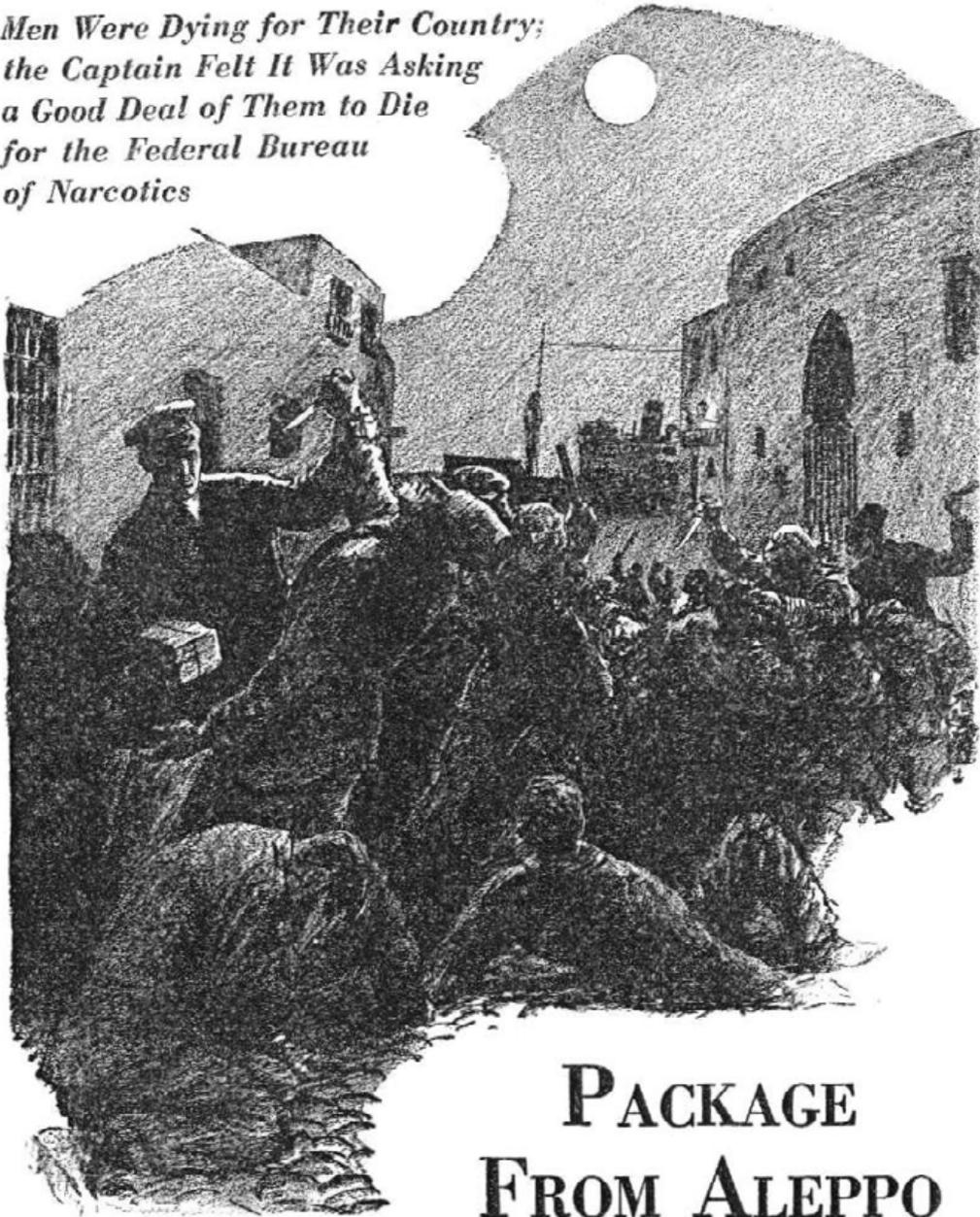


*Men Were Dying for Their Country;
the Captain Felt It Was Asking
a Good Deal of Them to Die
for the Federal Bureau
of Narcotics*



PACKAGE FROM ALEPPO

By **EDWARD DALY**

Author of "Date With a Convoy," etc."

WAYNE SAWTELL pushed his last neat stack of blue chips onto the red segment of cloth on the roulette table. The stack represented fifty Egyptian pounds. He dusted his hands together. The

small motion was eloquent of desperate resignation.

When the croupier called "*Rien ne plus,*" the players drew an audible intake of breath together, held it, watching the swirling ball. Only the croupier was

genuinely indifferent. He threw a swift, unbiased glance around the table, then studied his fingernails till the ball slowed, clicked to finality.

“*Noir.*”

Black. The croupier gathered in a lot, paid out a little. Arabs, Frenchmen, those of no particular race or breed ringed the table spared a glance of sympathy for the tall, young American humped in utter, absolute collapse before the croupier. “Been playing with stolen money,” the croupier thought philosophically. Behind the facade of his unconcern, the croupier thrilled to the thought that he was looking at a potential suicide.

A Frenchman with a vast, placid face, seated beside Sawtell, muttered a curse, got up. He laid a hand on Sawtell’s shoulder. A shiver passed through the younger man’s body. His haggard eyes rose beyond the Frenchman’s mountainous belly, meeting narrow-eyed sympathy.

“*C’est un grand malheur,*” the Frenchman condoled. It is a great misfortune. “Come, my friend, we will have a drink.”

The Frenchman was an habitué of the tables. Sawtell remembered his constant presence over the last three days. They stood by the bar, the American clutching inertly at a drink, aware of the other’s tense solicitude. Perhaps this was it—the eventuality he had been working for. A chill, electric, enlivening began to course down his spine.

The Frenchman was talking slowly, choosing his words. Sawtell kept his head down, maintaining his air of hopelessness. “Things are never as bad as they appear,” the Frenchman insisted quietly. “Certain people – friends – have been watching you.”

Sawtell jerked his head up, gave the other a quick, furtive glance. “What sort of friends?” he demanded coldly.

“Come with me.”

He led Sawtell through a door to the left of the bar, shrugging off the American’s plaintive queries.

A man sat by a desk in the center of the small room. Behind and beyond him through the open window, Sawtell could see the moonlit panorama of Aleppo harbor, a mosquito-boat darting, bug-like, through the shipping. The man glanced up at him, then at his companion. Sawtell caught the mutual exchanges of glances, controlled, delicately triumphant.

“Mr. Brown,” the fat man said blandly.

Brown motioned Sawtell to a chair, produced cigarettes. He was neither white nor Arab, tall nor short, dark nor fair. Mr. Brown was steeped in nonentity, the dead norm of the French-Syrian waterfront. Sawtell thought, “A hard man to describe.”

HE SAT down, took a cigarette, stared woodenly at Brown. “What the hell’s all this about?” As he spoke, his mind thumbed softly back to the long train of carefully arranged circumstance that culminated in this meeting. It began way back in Washington, in the Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

Brown said, “You’re name is Sawtell, assistant purser on the S.S. *Lorrimer* and you have lost, to us, two thousand pounds Egyptian of the ship’s funds. You see,” he said smiling, “we know all about you.” He stared at Sawtell for a long moment. “What are you going to do about it?”

Sawtell came out of his stupor with gathering violence. “That’s a lie!” he retorted hotly. Brown’s expression did not change. Sawtell’s voice altered abruptly. He faltered, “What—how—what are you going to do about it?”

Brown laughed through tight lips. “Nothing,” he said. “The law takes care of you. Unless—”

Sawtell stiffened, assumed an air of

hopeful craftiness. "Unless what?"

There was silence for a moment broken only by the fat man's asthmatic breathing by the doorway. Brown regarded Sawtell meditatively. Sawtell had the odd feeling that for the last two months he had been living for this precise moment. He thought: It depends on me now whether he commits himself. He regarded Brown with a sort of humble desperation. Brown leaned forward.

"Mr. Sawtell, am I correct in my impression that you would do anything to get your money back; to keep out of jail?"

Sawtell bridled a little. "Well, I won't kill anybody."

Brown grinned his satisfaction. He said, "I simply want a package taken to New York without benefit of customs inspection."

Sawtell raised his eyebrows. His shoulders began to straighten. "What's in the package?"

Brown extinguished his cigarette deliberately. "Heroin," he said. His slitted eyes fastened on Sawtell like a blight.

Sawtell whistled gently, "That's more dangerous than stealing money," he said slowly.

BROWN scoffed, "For a purser, there's very little risk. Certainly no greater risk than stealing your ship's funds. And there is five thousand dollars for you on delivery.

Sawtell said, "Now you're talking." His dolor went into eclipse. His inward jubilation was now outwardly manifest. Complete harmony settled on the room. "I told you everything would be all right," the fat man wheezed from the doorway.

Sawtell said, "How much is the package worth?"

Brown said, "I would hate to tell you how much it will be worth in New York. You might be tempted—"

Sawtell grinned crookedly, "Supposing I did double-cross you, trade on my own?"

A smile hovered over Brown's tight lips. "You'll be watched—everywhere. We'll be very concerned with your safety. Others may try and rob you. So long as you behave, this protection is working for you. Otherwise—" Brown's shrug held eloquent warning.

SAWTELL cut through the narrow, darkened streets, heading for the dock. He had four companions, a silent watchful cohort, two leading, two padding behind. Once, ahead, where a rare lamp flared a yellow hole in the violet dark, he thought he saw the oblique shadows of dispersing men. His guardians closed in on him, alert with the close-knit watchfulness of a presidential procession.

They were ahead of the lamp, almost out of the pale zone of its luminance when a swift clutching onslaught swept in on them.

Sawtell stood, the core of the melee. He backed against the wall, his defenders a solid phalanx before him. The six attackers recoiled, churned in again. There was no shouting, no shooting, just a labored, guttural savagery, the high arc of a flashing knife. A high whimper of pain broke from the man immediately in front of him. The man buckled and dropped. Sawtell seized, broke the savage down-thrust of a dagger-wielding arm.

The blow had been meant for him. The calm of desperation settled on Sawtell. The men fighting in his defense were being bested. Sawtell flung himself forward, sending jolting pile-driver punches right and left.

A newcomer loomed massively out of the darkness.

It was the Frenchman. Sawtell saw him dive into the writhing fury, pick up a man, hurling him bodily against the alley wall.

The man lay there grotesquely. The Frenchman swung in again, picked another. Sudden prudence descended on the attackers. They backed away from the cold deadliness of the fat man.

The alley was suddenly quiet again, broken only by the heavy breathing of the wounded.

The Frenchman turned to Sawtell, "*Vo-yons!* They wanted the money and—" He jerked a finger at the box to which Sawtell resolutely clung. "Name of a pig, one can keep nothing quiet in this town!"

IT WAS roughly the size of a shoe box. Sawtell locked it in his cabin desk, slipped away to the purser's office, replacing the money he had stolen. Luck was with him. Brin, the chief purser, had not missed the money. Only the captain and the men in Washington who had connived at his defalcation knew of it. Brin was not the type to suspect anything. His personal honesty was above reproach. He did not consider it dignified to mistrust his subordinate. Sawtell had thought of taking him into his confidence but decided against it. The fewer who knew his business the better.

Back in the cabin, he locked his door, began writing his report in the terse, clipped sentences of officialdom. Dawn was breaking when he finished. He lay back in his bunk, a sense of achievement glowing through the fog of his physical exhaustion.

In the morning he passed briefly on deck to watch the pleased Italians, the truculent German prisoners file aboard to eventual internment in the States.

Routine work was heavy in the purser's office. Sawtell took a seat beside Brin who was checking a list of prisoners' effects. He was a dark-skinned man with the suave dignity of a head-waiter. Now his small black eyes were disturbed. He said, "Take

these lists to the skipper for signature. After that, I want to talk to you."

Sawtell looked at him sharply, "Anything wrong?"

"Something has been wrong," Brin said carefully.

Captain Adams favored Sawtell's closing of his cabin door with a gem-like stare. "Why the pussyfooting?" he demanded brusquely. Then, as recollection smote him, he said, "Did you get on to something?"

Sawtell nodded. "It worked, at last. I have a package for delivery in New York. It's the New York end we are interested in. Is there any way of getting this report home before we dock?"

The captain glanced through it. He did it without relish. The captain considered that mines, bombs and torpedoes gave him enough to think about. The heavy thatch of his eyebrows shot up. "Are you seriously suggesting that Beringers, the jewelers, are mixed up in this business?"

"That's the address I've been given."

"Well, I'm not going to break radio silence for you or anybody else," Captain Adams said firmly. He thought a moment. "I'll take it to the navy. There's bound to be a warship home ahead of us. We sail in a couple of hours. Want to come ashore with me?"

Sawtell shook his head. "I'm being watched. Or so they said."

BRIN had the great safe open in the purser's office. He sat before it counting the ship's funds, slowly, deliberately. Sawtell said lightly, "Everything all right?" Brin's odd expression held his interest.

Brin swung round on the back legs of his chair. He stared at Sawtell intently. "Last night," he said, "there was two thousand in notes missing. This morning it is in place again."

Sawtell pursed his lips. So Brin *had* checked up on him. Well, he would have to let Brin in on the secret. He pulled his own chair round to face the purser. Brin's expression was pleased rather than accusative. A thought struck Sawtell: Brin's obvious duty should have been to report the discrepancy. He had not done so. The confession died on Sawtell's lips. He had the awareness of being in a highly complex situation. He had to keep talking while his mind raced. "You're nuts," he exploded softly. "Been out in the sun too long. Have you been to the skipper—he likes fairy stories?"

Brin's chair came forward with a crash. A spasm of rage flitted across his pale face. He snapped, "Never mind the skipper for now. And I don't like fairy stories. What was in that package you brought aboard from the Pavilion Bleu last night?"

Sawtell did not answer. He was too startled to answer. He studied Brin's face warily.

Brin said placatingly. "All right. I know what was in it. Our last trip here, a similar thing happened."

Sawtell laughed cautiously. "What's your game?"

Brin spread his hands. "You have the stuff. I have the contacts. We take it and sell it on our own. There's a fortune in it."

"Is that what you did on the last trip?"

Brin nodded.

Sawtell said curiously. "Who—where is the guy you did business with before?"

Brin frowned. "It's a funny thing but he was in an accident. A car ran him down and killed him."

Sawtell smiled bleakly, with his lips alone. "Odd kind of coincidence," he muttered. He sat a moment, thinking, calculating. He had a picture of a net with Brin fighting his way into it. But he had to keep his sights fixed. With Brin in on it, the thing might get out of his grasp. He began

to shake his head, slowly, decisively.

"It's no dice, Brin."

Brin's face darkened with a rush of blood. "You dirty crook," he flared. "See if you get away with it—" He pulled himself up abruptly, turned suavely to the grilled window of the office. Captain Adams was approaching.

The captain said, "You guys all set? We're about to sail."

Brin said, "Yes, sir." Sawtell nodded. The captain's glance swung from Brin to Sawtell. "Good. Everything else is okay."

THE *Lorrimer*, a pre-war luxury liner, now a drab Goliath in her war paint, slid through the eastern Mediterranean. Before going to his cabin Sawtell watched the fussing, attending destroyer with a stir of pride. French Syria receded in the distance.

Entering his cabin, he stood stock still for a moment, crossed quickly, unlocking the desk. Flopping weakly in the chair, a great sigh of relief whistled through his compressed lips. His cabin and desk had been searched—searched with economy and extreme precision.

Miraculously, the parcel was still there. His mind juggled with this odd circumstance. The truth smote him with the force of a revelation. The searcher's motive could not have been robbery; this, therefore, must be the work of those assigned to protect him. Sawtell grinned at the irony of it, rang for the steward.

The steward came noiselessly, a huge man, his girth winning the battle with the seams of his white jacket. The hewn crafty face surveyed Sawtell contemptuously.

Sawtell stared, said, "You're not my steward. Where's Parker?"

THE steward shrugged, flexed his shoulders. The man's bulk was a muscular condition throughout. He rolled

his shoulders, giving an unsubtle display of his prowess. He radiated an animal offensiveness. Sawtell contained his shudder.

The steward said, "Parker and I exchanged duties. It is now my pleasure to look after you. Name of Nuzbaum." His narrowed eyes defied contradiction.

Sawtell said, "You've been in here already?"

"Checking up," Nuzbaum said. "Everything's in place." He made an elaborate grimace, hinting at unspoken complicity.

Sawtell gestured feebly. Nuzbaum went away. Sawtell wet his lips, and wished profoundly he could get in touch with America. He had the sense of being the hub of potential conflict. Nor could he invoke official cooperation. He was on his own resources, absolutely. Obviously, Brin would try and rob him. His mind quickened. Brin had brains and Nuzbaum had muscles. One versus the other. Wry-faced, he considered the equation. In the abstract, it made a nice problem. Unfortunately, he was not dealing in abstractions.

THE *Lorrimer* crossed the highway of ships ferrying Allied might across the Sicilian Narrows. Sawtell engineered another interview with the captain, airing his predicament.

"The radio is out," the captain stated flatly, obviously disgruntled. "Why the hell pick on my ship for these comic-opera maneuvers?" He glared at Sawtell. "If you start chinning with Washington, some Heinie'll be waiting in mid-Atlantic with a tin fish for us. It is more important that my ship gets through than that you catch Beringer Brothers." The captain's objections were both concrete and vocal. "Nobody on here," he said, "wants to die for the Federal Bureau of Narcotics."

Sawtell laughed, said lightly, "I'm not anxious to be a name on a plaque either."

Captain Adams said, "The ship is alive with soldiers guarding the prisoners. I can fill your damn cabin with them—"

Sawtell declined emphatically. "That would scare everybody. I've got this far—" He stopped abruptly, a grin slashing across his lean face. "I think I have it, sir. A way to make everybody happy—"

THE passage of days brought Sawtell a feeling of anti-climax. He had been keyed-up, tense, momentarily expecting a move from Brin; but the chief purser had lapsed into his old suavity.

With the coming of darkness on the second night before reaching New York, the *Catalina* flying-boat winked "goodnight" to the bridge and headed west. All day, the *Catalina* had circled the ship, protective, vigilant.

The sight of it sent Sawtell's spirits surging upwards. It was a token, a herald of the approaching moment when the complexity of his situation would resolve itself. From the rails, he watched its hooded navigation lights dwindle in the distance, then turned, his face hard and set, descending to his cabin.

He fumbled for the switch button. The switch clicked but there was no answering flood of light. Sawtell froze, confounded by the peculiar quietness of the cabin, eyes trying to pierce the darkness.

A tremendous blow to the side of the head sent him tumbling into the forward bulkhead. He whirled, fighting off the red mist invading his brain. Sawtell crouched, ears alert, eyes dilated. The blue, blackout light from the gangway shed a wretched glow in the open doorway. It heightened, rather than lessened, the deep gloom of the cabin.

The steady, rhythmic sound of someone breathing whispered to him from across the

cabin. Sawtell gauged it, braced himself, threw himself toward it.

A sliver of flame split the darkness. Sawtell saw it, lurched to one side, felt the bullet, like the hot breath of death, fan past his cheek. There was the noisy plop of a silencer. Sawtell collided with a chair. He struggled upright. A hand fell on his hair, tangled with it. He attempted to jerk free, then a pulverizing blow to the nape of the neck sent him out like a light.

HIS mind took hold again. The cabin door see-sawed gently to the motion of the ship. He tried to shake off his lightheadedness, scrambled to his feet. Instinct told him he was alone. He groped, found and screwed in the light bulb.

The cabin was a shambles. There was no need to go near the desk. From where Sawtell stood, he could see the drawer wrenched open. He stared at its empty disorder.

A grin, in spite of the ringing pain in his head, sprang to his lips.

Nuzbaum came into the cabin softly. He stared at the havoc for one thunder-struck second, then his eyes swung to Sawtell prone on the bunk.

With a choked-off howl, Nuzbaum leaped toward the desk. His inspection was brief, a dismayed scramble in the disorder of papers. His face contorted, he swung round on Sawtell, crossed to the bunk in a leap.

His demand was a furious hiss. "Where is it?"

Sawtell struggled to a sitting position. The pain in his head was searing agony. He raised his hands feebly but the steward had him by the throat, yanking him bodily from the bed.

Nuzbaum's rage was homicidal. His thick fingers buried themselves deep in Sawtell's neck. Weakly, Sawtell tried to

beat him, while a roaring oblivion began to envelop him.

Then, mercifully, the pressure slackened. Sawtell sagged to the deck. The steward jerked him upright again, and propped him against the bulkhead.

With difficulty, Nuzbaum got his rage under control. With his free hand he wiped the sweat from his face. He repeated, "Where is—before I kill you!"

He waited, a lull in his fury, while Sawtell fought for breath. Sawtell did not speak at once. His mind outpaced his body. While his body ached, he raged inwardly with a cold and furious anger. Nuzbaum's expression was implacable with determination. Sawtell knew that he was in deadly danger. Even with the full possession of his strength he was no physical match for this goliath. His life depended on what he said. The truth was his only hope.

He gasped, "I've been robbed."

Nuzbaum's laugh grated harshly. "I get orders," he sneered, "idiotic orders, keeping me in the hold for two hours checking baggage. When I get back—you tell me you've been robbed." He laughed again. His amusement held the lethal indulgence of an executioner. "Those orders," he said, "came from the purser's office."

Instantly, Sawtell thought, so it was Brin. He said, "Let me sit down a minute." He laughed with weak triumph. "I expected this. There were two parcels. I made another. The dummy has been stolen."

Relief, incredulity, stormed the steward's face. His eyes traveled round the cabin. He snapped, "Then where's the real one?"

"In the captain's safe."

The steward's patience broke. He struck Sawtell savagely with the open palm of his hand. "That's a hot one," he said.

"It's the truth," Sawtell exclaimed wearily. Inspiration came to him. He warned, "Interfere with my plans and you'll live to regret it."

The steward stepped back. His hands fell to his sides, helplessly. He was uneasy, bewildered. He toadied to Sawtell's gathering defiance. "But why the captain's safe?" he pleaded. "Why not your own safe in the purser's office?"

Sawtell laughed, enjoying the other's consternation. "The skipper is a good guy," he said. "I told him I was smuggling in a few pieces of silver Amarah work. The customs guy usually check the purser's safe and records. And I don't trust Brin." Sawtell watched Nuzbaum closely but the steward showed no change of expression at the mention of Brin's name. "Nobody," Sawtell declaimed, "objects to a little innocent smuggling."

Nuzbaum said, heavily, "I don't like it."

"The hell with you whether you like it or not."

Nuzbaum said doggedly, "My job is to guard the stuff."

"And a sweet mess you've made of it."

The steward scratched his head, grumbled on his way to the door, "What's going to happen to me when we get to New York?"

"You'll be taken care of," Sawtell assured him softly. "Once I get this stuff ashore—everyone gets taken care of."

THE *Lorrimer* docked without fanfare.

There was ordered chaos on the crowded decks where the dispirited prisoners bunched waiting to funnel down the gangplank. Colonel Thurman, the senior military officer aboard went ashore first. The colonel had a busy day ahead of him. First, he had a long telephone message to deliver. It was a complex story about jewelers, pursers and dope. The colonel

made no effort to understand it; but he gave the message verbatim.

In the purser's office, Brin closed the last ledger with a contented sigh. He surveyed Sawtell with amused contempt.

"I expected you to look more miserable than you do."

Sawtell shrugged, philosophically, "You tried to murder me and failed. I've got every reason to be contented. You're welcome to what you've stolen."

Brin bowed ironically.

Sawtell said, "I nurse the hope that you will be caught. That would make me even happier yet."

Brin laughed. "Old birds don't scare easy," he said. "There's not a damn thing you can do about it."

They laughed together, Sawtell ironically, Brin with relish.

The package was back in the cabin. Since its return, Nuzbaum had become a fixture. "No one can ever say that you don't earn your money," Sawtell said admiringly.

Nuzbaum said, "How are you going to get it ashore?"

"I just put it in this suitcase," Sawtell said. "The customs men all love and trust me." The steward shook his head doubtfully. Sawtell added threateningly, "I don't want you fussing round me like an old hen. That face of yours inspires distrust."

"I'm here to watch you," Nuzbaum said unmoved.

"Then do it from a distance," Sawtell advised.

The dock was empty now, save for the military guards, the loose stream of crew members filing through the customs office. Men were scattered around the large bleak room. They looked at Sawtell without recognition. Sawtell saw them and the tight feeling in his chest lightened.

"Anything to declare, Mr. Sawtell?"

“Not a thing.”

The inspector grinned; made his hieroglyphic on Sawtell's suitcase. Next in line, Nuzbaum's relief was almost audible.

Out on the street, Sawtell was at once aware of a couple of men, livening perceptibly as he made his exit. They bore down on him in a subdued gallop. Sawtell flung himself into a cab, slammed the door. He heard Nuzbaum's shout, saw him join the other two men.

“Step on it!” Sawtell shouted.

“Thirty-five miles an hour, buddy. Some guys hollering at you—” Sawtell showed a badge. The driver blinked, slammed his foot down. Turning, Sawtell could see the other car rocketing in pursuit, weaving a crazy pattern through indignant traffic. A police car, siren wailing, shot out from a side street. Sawtell's tension eased. He had a brief, diminishing view of the pursuing car hemmed into the sidewalk, of an avalanche of policemen.

“Now, you can take it easier.”

THE establishment of Beringer Brothers glowed with a discreet, subdued elegance. Sawtell's eyes made a quick canvass as he entered. A soldier and his girl hovered with a sort of hopeless awe before a tray of expensive diamonds. Six men were buying watches. They threw casual glances at Sawtell, their backs stiffening perceptibly.

Sawtell crossed to the blonde cashier in her cage. She surveyed him with the aloof indifference of a movie-house cashier.

“I want to see one or both of the Beringer Brothers.”

The cashier glanced at his bag. “Mr. Sawtell, is it?” Sawtell nodded. “They're expecting you,” the blonde announced. “Through this way.”

Sawtell lingered just long enough to see several things happen. One of the watch buyers stuck his hand through the grille,

clamped it over the cashier's phone. The others slipped behind the counters. Each took an attendant. The attendants were shrugging with uniform elegance as Sawtell disappeared.

THE brothers Beringer were identical twins, bald, thick-nosed with a faint, indefinable accent. They exuded genteel enthusiasm. One brought a chair, the other a drink. Sawtell refused both, clung resolutely to his suitcase.

He said curiously, “Who told you I was coming?”

“Some soldiers phoned us,” Claude Beringer said.

Robert, his brother, added, “Some sailors, too.”

“Soldiers and sailors!”

The brothers chuckled. Claude said, “It's quite simple really. Give a dozen of them five dollars apiece to call us that we are to expect a Mr. Sawtell. About ten have called.”

“It speaks highly for the honesty of our service men,” brother Robert said approvingly.

Sawtell said, “Give me my five thousand and let me get rid of this stuff.”

He produced the package. Robert took it, crossed to the massive corner safe, returning with a sheaf of bills.

The money exchanged hands. The brothers smiled in union. Sawtell could hear his own heart beat; this was the moment he had worked for, the concrete act of buying and selling that constituted evidence. He had the sense of doing his duty, but his personal triumph was inadequate. Brin was still at large. Brin was being watched, but he was elusive, crafty.

“And I think that's all,” brother Robert smiled.

“Not quite,” Sawtell said.

The brothers' smile became a white-lipped fixture. They stared at the

unwavering menace of the revolver in Sawtell's hand.

Brother Claude croaked, "What's this—a hold-up?"

Sawtell faced them stolidly, without passion. "In an official way," he said "You are under arrest—"

Men tumbled into the office, ranging themselves alongside the disillusioned brothers. The divisional chief canvassed Sawtell's face anxiously.

Sawtell nodded, "The stuff's in the safe—"

Robert Beringer squealed, "I want to see my lawyer."

"Certainly," the chief announced. "You are going to need him."

The office partially emptied as the brothers were shepherded away. Sawtell flopped in the chair before the elegant desk. The phone rang shrilly.

"Hello." The watchers saw Sawtell's face tighten. He said into the phone, "Thirty thousand is a lot of money—but if you have the merchandise. Wait, I'll talk with my brother—" Sawtell clapped his hand over the receiver. He said, "It's Brin."

The chief frowned. "The guy you had us follow. He's at the Belvedere Hotel. Where does he fit in?"

Sawtell pleaded, "Let me handle it."

The chief gestured benevolently. "Okay," he said. "We got the birds we want."

Into the phone, Sawtell said. "Bring it here. We'll pay the price."

Sawtell made rapid plans. The outer office was cleared of its regular attendants, men from the department adopting the role of salesmen. Divisional Chief Morley stayed with Sawtell.

Brin walked in confidently, escorted by Garvey, the temporary cashier. Behind him, Garvey's big Irish face contorted in an elaborate wink. Sawtell had his back to the

window so that though Brin's whole attention was focused on him, recognition was not immediate.

Suddenly, it dawned on him. He stared at Sawtell. His lips faltered, no sound came from them. His eyes swept round, settled on Morley, standing with loose-knit awareness in the corner.

Brin's pale face drained further. He said weakly, "I don't understand—you—"

"Me," Sawtell said. He gestured toward Morley. "Meet the chief of the department."

"Department—"

"Keep your hands out of your pockets," Morley growled softly.

Brin's face decomposed slowly. The package dropped to the floor from his nerveless fingers. The implacable, fixed regard of Morley and Sawtell seemed to rob him of coherent thought and action. Morley crossed to Sawtell, whispered:

"Very fine theatre; but if there's nothing but common salt in the package—what the hell are we going to do with him?"

Sawtell grinned. "It's mostly salt," he said. "But there's about an ounce of the stuff, too. I know. *I put it there!*"

Morley beamed. He turned to Brin with a gesture that was almost affectionate.

Garvey burst into the office. He carried a tray of expensive diamond rings. "We made a sale," he cried jubilantly. "Sold one of these rings to a soldier and his gal. Got twenty bucks for it—"

Chief Morley shook his head. "Why, those rings," he cried, "must be worth five or six hundred dollars apiece."

Garvey scratched his head ruefully. "They both did think it was a bargain. They got out of the joint—fast. He added reminiscently, "The girl, in particular, seemed a little dazed."