

Live Bait

by Harley L. Court

They're all tough—the cop and the reporter and the girl. But the reporter weakens when he finds that it's his job to put the girl on the spot.



BILL FRAZIER of the *Sentinel* was a tough reporter. Police Chief Joe Riley was a tough cop. The two of them sat in Riley's private office at headquarters, glaring at each other.

Riley leaned forward in his swivel-chair and growled, "You'll print the story just like I gave it to you, Frazier. Who the hell do you think you are, anyhow—God?"

Bill Frazier snapped, "No. I don't think I'm God. But I won't use that story. I'm no murderer!"

He looked into the police chief's unwinking eyes. They were like glittering beads of shiny black glass, without expression. Riley's heavy face was mottled with tiny, angry red veins.

He reminded Frazier of a cobra the reporter had once seen in a zoo. Its eyes had been like Riley's, and Riley's fat, bulging neck was somehow reminiscent of the snake's rage-puffed hood.

Riley said, "What the hell do you care, Frazier, if the dame runs a chance of getting rubbed out? What's she to you? You been monkeying around with her?"

Frazier flushed darkly and said, "No. She's nothing to me. I've never even seen her—don't know what she looks like. The Beretti case was before my time in this burg. You know that the *Sentinel* brought me here a month ago to work up an investigation on the dope-running racket that's going on in this town. That's my job and I'm going to stick to it."

Riley said, "To hell with the dope-running investigation. I'm giving you a chance to get an exclusive story on the recapture of Thumbs Beretti, a convicted murderer. You ought to be grateful."

"Grateful my eye!" Frazier retorted. "I don't approve of setting a trap with live bait."

Riley sneered. "So you don't approve!" he mocked with heavy sarcasm. "All right. To hell with you, then!" The chief reached across his cluttered desk, untangled his telephone, mauled the receiver hook up and down with his thick fingers. He said, "Operator—get me Travis Jurgen, the publisher of the *Sentinel*." He spat a thin stream of tobacco juice into a cuspidor while he waited. Frazier thought of a snake spewing venom.

IN a moment Riley said, "Hello—Mr. Jurgen? This is Joe Riley at headquarters. Yeah. I got something I want you to publish, but your man Frazier won't take it. Huh? Give it to you? Sure. Here goes:

"It's an angle on the Thumbs Beretti case. You know Beretti pulled a lam out of stir this afternoon. You carried the story in your final edition tonight. Beretti was doing life for murder. He broke loose from the pen—got away clean."

Riley paused an instant. Then he went on. "Do you remember that moll named Evelyn Litori? Yeah—she was Beretti's sweetie. A fan-dancer in a nightclub clip-joint. It was her testimony that

smashed Beretti's alibi and sent him up. We promised her protection for turning State's evidence because she was scared some of Beretti's pals would put the heat on her for what she did."

Again Riley paused; then, once more, he continued. "This Litori dame has been in hiding ever since Beretti was sent up. But I know where she's been living. Apartment 12 in the Gabriel Arms, at Raymond and Penn. Yeah.

"Now, here's what's on my mind. I want you to carry a little mention of her in your midnight edition tonight. Be sure to mention her address. The way I figure it, Beretti will make for this town first thing. He'll be reading the papers to see what's printed about his escape. He'll also be looking for Evelyn Litori—to settle his grudge with her.

"When he sees her address in the *Sentinel*, he'll go there all primed to feed her a lead pill. I'll have my men posted all around the apartment. Beretti will walk right into my trap. The Litori girl will be the bait that will bring him."

There was a short silence while Riley listened. Then Riley said, "You'll do it? That's fine! Thanks a lot, Mr. Jurgen." The police chief hung up. He turned and favored Bill Frazier with a snarling triumphant laugh. He said, "How do you like them apples, Frazier?"

Frazier said, "Riley, you're a heel." Then he got up and walked out.

HE GOT a taxi and drove to the *Sentinel* building. He went into the private sanctum of Travis Jurgen, the paper's publisher. Jurgen looked up and regarded him with an air of faint disapproval.

Frazier said, "Boss, you aren't going to carry that stuff about the Litori woman, are you?"

Jurgen, grey-haired and kindly, said, "Yeah. Why shouldn't we? It might help the police to recapture Thumbs Beretti."

Frazier said, "Yeah. And it might also be Evelyn Litori's death warrant."

Travis Jurgen looked pained. "How do you mean that?" he asked slowly.

Frazier said, "Suppose Thumbs Beretti slips past the police at the dame's apartment! He'll bump her off, sure as hell."

"But the police will be sure to capture him," Jurgen pointed out steadily.

Frazier said, "Yeah. But a hell of a lot of good that will do Evelyn Litori after she's croaked."

The *Sentinel's* publisher frowned. He said, "See here, Frazier. You came to this paper with the reputation of being a hardboiled reporter—a tough egg. I hired you on that assumption. I sent you out to track down the gang that's been running dope into the city. Thus far, you've flopped on the job—"

"So have the police," Frazier interrupted wryly.

Jurgen disregarded him. "Now you're trying to tell me how to run my paper. You're acting like a sob-sister. Don't you realize that if we carry Evelyn Litori's address and it's instrumental in the capture of Beretti, it will be a big feather in the *Sentinel's* cap?"

Frazier said, "So you're going ahead and run the thing, eh, boss?"

Travis Jurgen said, "Yes. I'm going to run her address."

"Without giving her some warning, so she can protect herself?"

Jurgen said, "I can't see where that's necessary. She might leave—and there'd be no bait in the trap."

Frazier said, "Okay." He turned on his heels and strode out.

He went into a corner saloon and ordered scotch. The electric clock behind the bar indicated thirty minutes before midnight. At midnight, the *Sentinel* would be on the streets and then Thumbs Beretti would head towards Evelyn Litori's apartment. . . .

Frazier said, "Hell! I'm supposed to be tough—and here I am worrying about some jane I never met. He downed his drink. He frowned. Then he said, "To hell with my job!" He slapped a quarter on the bar. He walked out and hailed a passing night-owl cab. To the driver he said, "Raymond and Penn, buddy. Let's not linger on the way."

The cab lurched forward. At the corner of Raymond and Penn, it drew to a halt before the entrance to the Gabriel Arms apartments. Frazier got out. He said, "How much am I stuck for, buddy?"

The driver said, "One buck, two bits."

Frazier said, "How would you like to earn an extra ten-spot?"

The driver grinned and said, "Who do you want bumped off?"

Frazier said, "Nobody. I just want you to wait here and keep your trap shut about anything you might see. Is it a bargain?"

The driver said, "Yeah. It's a bargain. Where's

the ten bucks?”

Frazier reached into his pocket, withdrew a crumpled ten. He tore it in half and handed part of the mutilated bill to the taxi driver. He said, “You’ll get the other half when I come back.” Then he went into the apartment building.

It was an unpretentious, inexpensive two-story residential structure. Frazier climbed up the stairs to the second floor, found a door lettered “12.” He rang the bell.

He waited a long while. Then the door opened. Frazier saw a red-haired girl standing inside the doorway. She was clad in sheer silk pajamas, and she stared drowsily at Frazier out of deep violet eyes. Her bare arms were white and smooth, and her face was pretty, even without makeup.

Her hips were sleek and feminine. Her breasts thrust firmly against the silk of her pajama top. She didn’t look like the sort of girl who’d be a gangster’s moll.

She said, “What do you want—?”

Frazier said, “I want you.” Then he raised his fist and hit her on the jaw. He caught her as she fell. Her body was light and dainty and fragile. Frazier’s palm pressed into the warm base of one resilient breast as he lifted her in his strong arms.

There was a rear stairway at the far end of the corridor. Frazier carried the girl toward it. He went downstairs. The girl was limp in his grasp. A faint fragrance arose from her tousled red hair.

The low-cut front of her pajama top bulged open, revealing a hint of creamy, swelling delights beneath. Frazier felt a tingling sensation in his veins. The girl’s head lolled back, so that he could see the flawless whiteness of her young throat.

He went out through the rear door of the apartment house. He crept forward through the alley. He took a chance and dashed toward the street.

The taxi driver saw him coming, opened the door of the cab. Frazier dumped the redheaded girl inside the vehicle, scrambled in after her. He tossed the remaining half of the torn ten dollar bill to the driver. The man slammed the cab’s door. Frazier said, “Oakland and Herkimer, buddy. Step on it.” The taxi-man nodded, slid behind his steering wheel. The cab shot forward.

IN THE dark tonneau, Frazier held the unconscious red-haired girl close to him. He could feel the sleekness of her skin through the

thin silk; could feel the tender firmness of her breasts and the lush curves of her hips and thighs. He wondered what she’d say when she found out he’d saved her from Thumbs Beretti. Maybe she’d be grateful enough to offer something in repayment! Frazier smiled as he thought of the only payment he’d like from her. . . .

The red-haired girl was still unconscious when the cab reached Oakland and Herkimer, where Frazier had an apartment. Frazier carried her out of the machine. He took her into his flat.



With the girl's body in his arms, he staggered toward the open laundry chute.

He laid her on a divan in his living room. He got some Scotch and forced it between her red, kiss-inviting lips. She choked, opened her violet eyes, stared at him wildly.

Frazier said, “Don’t scream, baby. I’m not going to hurt you. I just brought you here to save you from the possibility of getting bumped off.”

She drew a deep, startled breath. Her breasts pointed intriguingly through the thin silk of her pajamas. The girl struggled, tried to get up.

Frazier pushed her back, his hands against her firm bosom. He said, “For God’s sake, don’t raise a row. I tell you I’ve done you a favor by bringing you here.”

She said, “Wh-what do you mean?”

Frazier lighted a cigarette and said, “Listen, honey. I know all about you. You’re Evelyn Litori. You used to be Thumbs Beretti’s moll. Your testimony sent Beretti to the pen for life. But he

escaped today—and he'll be gunning for you as soon as he finds out where you live. He'll find that out as soon as he reads the midnight edition of the *Sentinel*." Frazier looked at his wristwatch. "That will be about three minutes from now," he added.

The girl stared at Frazier. She said, "You—you've got to let me out of here! You've—"

Frazier said, "Nuts. If you're scared of me, forget it. I'm a reporter on the *Sentinel*. I'm not going to hurt you."

"But—but you don't understand!" the girl cried out. "I—I'm not Evelyn Litori!"

Frazier leaped to his feet. He said, "What the hell!" in a startled voice. He felt a sudden fear sink its fingers into his chest.

The girl grabbed at him. "Listen!" she whispered swiftly, tensely. "My name's Aline Blair. I—I live with Evelyn Litori—share the apartment with her. Evelyn is working as a waitress in an all-night restaurant. She gets through at eleven-thirty. She's due home around midnight. When you knocked, a while ago, I thought it was Evelyn. You—you kidnapped the wrong girl!"

Frazier looked at his wristwatch. It was midnight, even up. He said, "Good God!"

THE red-haired Aline Blair whispered, "You've got to do something! Evelyn's already in one jam—and now, with Beretti after her, she's in double danger!"

Frazier stared. "What's her other jam?" he barked.

"She—she got mixed up with some dope-runners. She's afraid of them. I—I don't know who they are, but—"

Frazier said, "Hell! If I save the Litori dame from Thumbs Beretti, she might help me break my narcotic-ring story!" He turned, leaped for the door. He said, "You wait here, red! I'm going after her. There may still be time!"

The girl ran toward him swiftly, grasped at his arm, pressed herself thrillingly against him. "You—you'll be careful?" she said huskily.

Frazier looked into her eyes. An abrupt acceleration pulsed in his heart. For an instant his hands touched the red-haired girl's warm body. Impulsively he kissed her. "I'll be careful!" he promised. He plunged out of the room.

He went out of the house. His own car was parked in a garage under the building. He slammed himself into it, ground his heel against the starter.

He twisted the machine out of the basement garage and headed for Raymond and Penn—the Gabriel Arms apartments.

He parked a block away from the building where Evelyn Litori lived. He strode forward, keeping to the shadows. He ducked into an alley behind the apartment building; reached the rear entrance.

He heard a shot.

It was muffled, indistinct. It brought a sudden panic to Bill Frazier. "God—I'm too late!" he rasped. He launched himself inside the house.

A rushing shape smashed into him, bowled him over. He felt a fist thud against his jaw. He sagged backward as the dark figure swept past him into the alley. Frazier staggered, righted himself. Savagely he shook his head to clear it. He swayed toward the door leading into the alley, stared out. No moving thing stirred in the night's darkness.

Frazier's unknown assailant had got away clean . . . and where in hell were the police?

THE reporter hesitated, his mind a blurry fog of eddying, swirling thoughts. Then, abruptly, he said, "Damn the lousy rats—!" and turned back into the building. He pelted up the rear stairway, gained the second-floor corridor. He reached Apartment 12—Evelyn Litori's apartment. Its door was open.

Frazier burst into the tiny living room. Beyond, he saw an open door leading into a bedchamber. He leaped for it. Then he brought up short, white-faced, wide-eyed.

A girl's naked body lay across the bed. Long hair the blue-black of a raven's wing hung in streaming disorder over her bare shoulders, partially obscured her heavy breasts. Her torso was full and white; wide hips melted into firm-fleshed thighs and smooth, lilting legs. Her face was pretty with a hard Latin prettiness; and there was a round red hole in her left breast. Blood welled wetly from the hole.

Frazier lunged toward the bed, stared down. The black-haired girl's eyes fluttered open. They were glazing, lusterless. Her lips were dead white beneath heavy application of rouge. A rattling, gasping breath gurgled at the back of her throat.

Frazier said, "Who shot you—tell me! Quick!"

"I—dope ring—" All the breath went out of the girl in a wheezing, exhaling gasp. She went limp. Her eyes rolled back in her head. Her jaw sagged

open in the fixed grin of death!

Frazier grabbed the girl's wrist. There was no pulse, no heartbeat.

In the distance below, the reporter heard wailing sirens as police cars converged toward the apartment house. He stared about him. The dead girl's clothing was scattered about as though she had been undressing for bed when murder had overtaken her. There was a cheap red dress, shoddy underthings, inexpensive shoes and hose.

Downstairs, the police sirens grew louder, shriller. Frazier leaped out of the bedroom, through the living room, into a tiny kitchenette. He snapped on the lights, opened what appeared to be the door of a half-size closet. He saw the yawning aperture of a metal-lined laundry chute leading into the basement—

He whirled, launched himself headlong back into the bedroom. He gathered up the murdered girl's clothes, wadded them into a bundle, packed it under his arm. Then he leaned over the bed, lifted the naked feminine corpse.

With his double burden he staggered toward the kitchenette, reached the open laundry chute. He tossed the wadded bundle of clothing down the chute. Then he stuffed the limp corpse into the aperture, clung to it while he crawled in behind it. Below him, on the first floor of the building, he heard heavy, pelting footsteps.

He braced himself, cursed in his throat—and released his grip on the door of the laundry chute. He plummeted downward into solid darkness, the murdered girl's corpse sliding ahead of him with a faint, weird, slithering sound.

Frazier spread his knees, his elbows, breaking the momentum of his descent. The smooth metal lining of the chute burned his flesh with the friction of his passing. He gritted his teeth. Abruptly he shot forward, landed in a heap on the basement floor. The dead girl's body cushioned under him sickeningly. . . .

He scrambled to his feet in the intense blackness, got his bearings. He found the wadded bundle of feminine clothing, picked it up. Then he grasped the murdered girl's body, flung it over his broad shoulder. He staggered toward the rear of the cellar.

THERE were steps leading upward. Frazier took them two at a time. He punched through a door—and found himself into the alley behind

the apartment building. He gathered his protesting muscles, lurched through the protecting shadows. He came to his parked car. He flung the limp corpse of the brunette girl into the machine, dumped her clothing in after her.

He raced around to the car's far side, climbed in under the wheel, ground down on the starter. The motor coughed, purred smoothly. Frazier slammed into second. The car jerked forward on screaming tires. As he twisted the machine around a corner, the reporter felt the dead girl's body sag against him. Goose pimples crawled on his skin. He clenched his teeth, stepped down harder on the throttle.

At last he reached Oakland and Herkimer. He swerved his car into the basement garage beneath his apartment, snapped off his lights. There was one dim bulb burning overhead. Frazier found the switch that controlled it, snapped it off. Then, in the darkness, he delved into his car, grasped the dead girl's body, picked up her wadded garments. He carried corpse and clothing toward the rear stairs.

The first-floor corridor of the house was deserted. Frazier slipped down the hallway, reached the door of his flat. He unlocked it, staggered inside.

The red-haired Aline Blair was in the middle of the room, staring white-faced toward the door. She saw Frazier; saw his gruesome burden. Her hand went to her breast. "Oh—!" she wailed faintly.

Frazier deposited the brunette's corpse on the divan. Then he looked at the red-haired girl through grim, narrowed eyes. He said, "I got there just too late."

"Evelyn—Evelyn Litori!" the red-haired girl whispered with a tiny, choked sob. "She—she's dead? Beretti . . . killed her?"

Frazier's jaw jutted. He said, "I don't know. It may have been Beretti and it might have been someone else. The cops weren't on the job, so the murderer slugged me and made his getaway. I didn't see his face."

Aline Blair shuddered. "But—but why did you bring her body here?" Her violet eyes went fearfully toward the pathetic, nude corpse on the divan.

The reporter scowled. "She wasn't quite dead when I reached her. She whispered something about the dope ring. That's why I think maybe it wasn't Beretti who killed her. And that's why I brought her corpse here to my flat. I've got a

scheme that may lay the killer by the heels, even yet!"

Aline Blair said. "A—a scheme?"

"Yes. A scheme—a desperate plan. But I'm going to need help. Your help," he added tensely. He went toward the red-haired girl, touched her arm gently. "Are you game to help me, red?" he whispered.

She looked into his eyes, blushed, shyly lowered her gaze. "I—I'll do anything I can . . . for you . . ." she answered.

Frazier's heart leaped. For a single instant he gathered the red-haired girl in his arms, crushed her against him, tasted the dewy sweetness of her moist lips. His hands strayed over her body, caressed her breasts and her hips through the thin silk of her pajamas.

She quivered in his arms; an undulant, sensuous movement rippled over her lithe body. There was a veiled promise in her eyes. . . .

And then, at last, she pushed herself free of his embrace. "What do you want me to do?" she asked quietly.

Frazier said, "Take off your pajamas. Put on Evelyn Litori's red dress."

She turned from him obediently, unquestioningly. Frazier went to the far side of the room, lifted his telephone, dialed the *Sentinel* office. Out of the corner of his eye he watched the red-haired Aline Blair as she picked up the murdered Litori girl's wadded clothing.

THEN Frazier got his number. He said, "Hello. *Sentinel*? Let me talk to Travis Jurgen, the publisher."

He waited a brief instant. Then he heard Travis Jurgen's voice saying, "Yes, who is it?"

The reporter said, "Listen, boss. This is Bill Frazier. I've got something damned hot for you. It ought to warrant an extra—right now!"

Jurgen said, "You sound excited. What's the story?"

"It's the Beretti case, boss. Somebody broke into Evelyn Litori's apartment and shot her. The cops were late getting on the job. The gunman got away clean."

"I know all that. We just got a flash from headquarters," Jurgen answered slowly.

"Yeah," Frazier said. "But here's something you don't know. I was on the job at the Gabriel Arms apartments. I heard the shot, and I smashed into the

Litori dame's flat. Evelyn Litori wasn't dead. The bullet had just grazed her ribs—knocked her cold. I dragged her out of her apartment and brought her here to my own joint at Oakland and Herkimer. I've got her here right now. She's unconscious—but when she comes to, she'll do plenty of talking! Does that sound like hot stuff, boss!"

Jurgen said, "Good Lord, man—it's the story of the year! I'll make-over Page One and put an extra on the streets. Meanwhile, you phone in the minute the Litori woman regains consciousness and starts talking! Stay right there with her until she does!"

Frazier said, "Okay, boss," and hung up. He turned around.

The red-haired Aline Blair had shrugged out of the upper part of her sheer pajamas; was standing, nude to the waist, preparing to don the murdered Evelyn Litori's red frock. Frazier stared at the girl—drank in the delicious vision of her firm breasts and snowy, flawless body.

She blushed under his scrutiny, tried to cover her bosom with her tiny hands. "Please—you mustn't look at me . . . that way!" she whispered, embarrassment in her eyes.

Frazier went toward her, touched her smooth shoulders almost reverently. Tingling thrills lanced through his veins at the intimate contact. "God, you're lovely!" he said.



He raised his fist and hit her on the jaw. It was to save her life, but he had no time to tell her that. Maybe sometime she'd be grateful

She looked at him. Abruptly a question leaped into her eyes; was reflected in her words as she spoke. "I heard you telling your paper that Evelyn wasn't dead," the girl whispered. "Why did you

lie?"

Frazier grinned mirthlessly. "Because I'm just a tough reporter," he answered.

"Because you're—tough? I don't understand—"

FRAZIER said, "Earlier tonight I kicked like hell because Police Chief Joe Riley wanted to bait a trap with live bait, wanted to use Evelyn Litori as a lure to recapture Thumbs Beretti. I was afraid the Litori girl might be bumped off—and I was right. And yet here I am, using the same rotten tactics myself!"

"You—you mean—?"

"Travis Jurgen just promised me he'd get out an extra, telling how I rescued Evelyn Litori and brought her here to my apartment. I'm hoping the murderer will see that story. In the belief that he bungled his killing job, he may come here to finish his work. And if he does—God help him!" Frazier rasped harshly.

"And you—you want me to impersonate Evelyn Litori?"

"Yes. Will you?"

"I—I'll do it. But I'm . . . afraid!" The red-haired girl crept close to Frazier. He enfolded her in his protecting arms, crushed her against him. Her firm breasts quivered under his questing fingers. . . .

She fused herself against his body for a helpless instant, while his lips sought and found her trembling mouth. He felt the warmth of thrilling warm girl-flesh against his palms, and fires were ignited in his throbbing veins. . . .

Abruptly Frazier stiffened. He heard a faint sound outside the closed window of the room. The reporter frowned. "That extra couldn't be out this soon!" he whispered swiftly. "And yet—I think somebody's trying to get in!"

He leaped for the light switch, clicked it. The room was plunged into darkness. Frazier heard a faint creaking noise outside the window. . . . He found the red-haired girl in the blackness, whispered swiftly into her ear. "Raise your voice—talk loud when I ask you a question!" he commanded. "Try to imitate Evelyn Litori's voice!"

"I—I'll try!" Aline Blair answered faintly.

Then Frazier spoke loudly. "You say it was a member of the narcotic gang who shot you, Miss Litori?"

"I—I think it was," the red-haired girl answered huskily, throatily.

"Can you name the man you suspect?"

"It was—"

AT THAT instant, Frazier heard the crashing of glass from his kitchenette behind him. He whirled, lunged toward the rear room. He stumbled against the electric refrigerator, cursed, found the light cord, pulled it.

In the sudden illumination he saw a jagged hole in the window. The pane had been gnashed in. But there was nobody in evidence. Frazier wheeled, puzzled.

Suddenly a woman screamed from the living room. It was the red-haired Aline Blair's voice, terror stricken in the darkness.

"God!" Frazier rasped "They tricked me!" Savage anger mounted in his brain as he realized that the smashing of his kitchenette window had been a ruse to draw him away from the living room. He turned, launched himself back toward the room where he had left the red-haired girl.

The gloom of the place was stabbed by a ghost-blue ray from an electric torch. Frazier saw two masculine figures. They were masked—and they held Aline Blair pinioned. One of the masked men whipped out a glittering knife, raised it high—

Frazier launched himself forward like a hurtling arrow, a rasping oath at his lips. The masked men turned. Frazier sprang sidewise, crashed into a table, upset it. As it fell, his hands closed over a heavy metal bookend. He raised it, hurled it—

It impacted with a sickening thud against the skull of the masked man who held the knife. The killer sagged, collapsed on the floor in an unconscious sprawl. His remaining companion sprang at Frazier. There was an automatic in his clenched fist. It roared; belched a tongue of fire.

FRAZIER felt a stinging stab of pain in his left arm; a numbing shock cascaded upward to his shoulder. He swayed and the masked man's second shot went wild. Frazier snarled, "Damn you to hell—!" and battered himself at his adversary. Their bodies met with bruising force; they closed together, locked in an embrace of death.

From one corner of the room, Aline Blair wailed in terror.

Bill Frazier twisted his one good arm loose; raised his fist, smashed it into the marked man's mouth. He felt his knuckles split under the impact against splintered teeth. His antagonist went

backward. Frazier leaped at him, rammed a knee into the man's groin. The masked gunman doubled up. Frazier grabbed at the automatic, wrenched it from the other's fingers. He reversed it, brought the butt down against the killer's skull.

The masked man pitched face-forward into oblivion.

Panting, Bill Frazier leaped for the light switch, snapped it on. The room glowed with light. Frazier rolled the limp bodies of his two unconscious antagonists face-upward; ripped at their masks—

"God in Heaven!" he choked. "Travis Jurgen of the *Sentinel* and Police Chief Joe Riley!"

The red-haired Aline Blair crept toward Frazier. "You—you mean they—"

"They must have been at the head of the narcotic ring!" Frazier rasped. "No wonder the police never where able to get anything on the dope-runners! The chief himself was one of the ringleaders! And Travis Jurgen, publisher of the *Sentinel*, was the other! Somehow, Evelyn Litori

found out about their connection with the dope traffic.

"They had to kill her to keep her from spilling what she knew. By chance, Thumbs Beretti happened to escape from the penitentiary today. So these men decided to kill the Litori girl—and make the thing look as though Beretti had done it! Now I understand why they got here before the *Sentinel's* extra edition was on the streets. When I phoned Travis Jurgen—lied to him about having Evelyn Litori here in my apartment, alive—he got in touch with Joe Riley, and the two of them came out here to finish their murderous work!"

Aline Blair shuddered against Frazier. Then she saw the blood dripping from his wounded arm, "Oh—!" she went white. "You're . . . hurt! My dear—you're hurt!" She grabbed at him, held him close against her.

He grinned down at her. "I'm not hurt badly. I'm tough," he said.