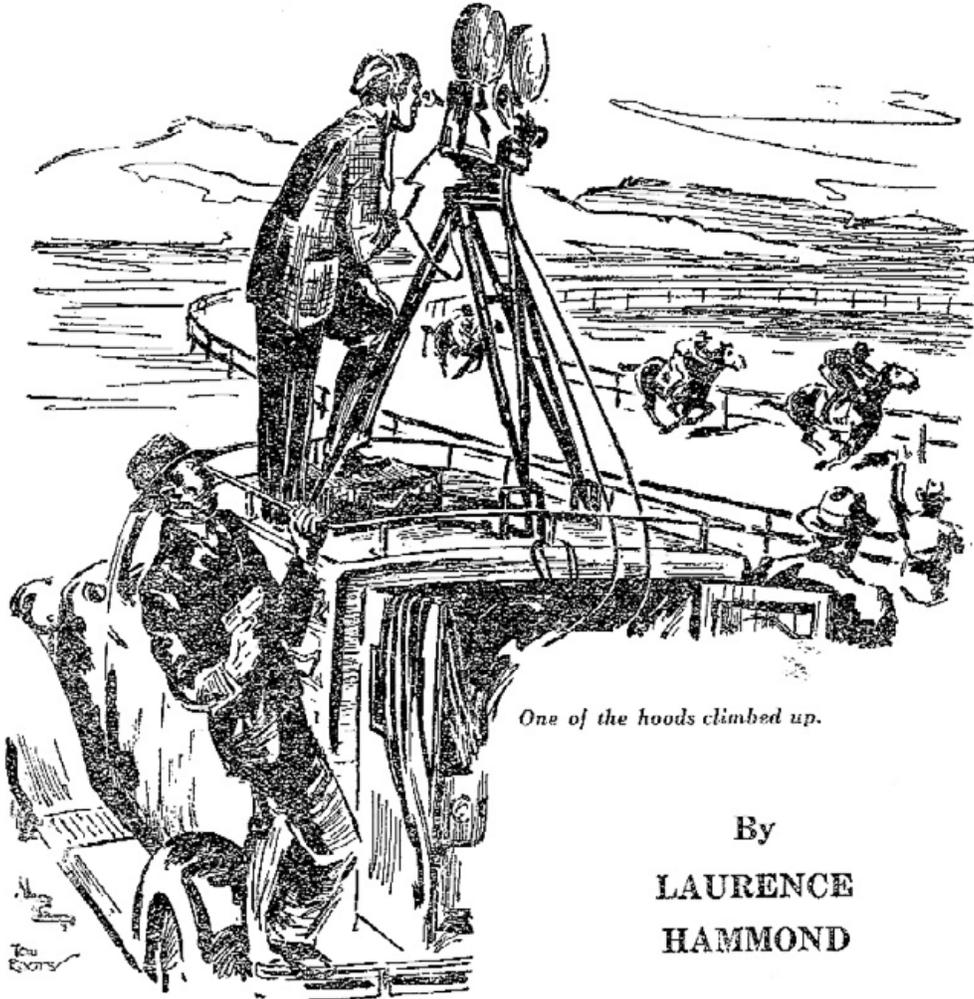


Newsreel Boomerang



One of the hoods climbed up.

By
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Odds Mingo and Snub Dugan, ace camera crew of the Excelsior Newsreel outfit, figured they were in for a dull day at the Belgrave Futurity shooting a bunch of nags running around a track. But when Odds started his camera, he found he was shooting—a close-up of Death.

THE big gray-green car swished across the Queensborough Bridge and took the curve sharply on two screeching wheels. Then it straightened out again and streaked along the concrete highway leading to Belgrave Park, Long Island's famous race track.

Inside the newsreel sound truck were microphones, cameras, and the ace camera

crew of the outfit. But the thoughts of one of the men were far from the pictures of the Belgrave Futurity they were to make.

"I got another one of those notes today," said the little man with the wizened face. He almost whispered the words, as if he were afraid some one might overhear him.

"What notes?" asked "Odds" Mingo

absently, thrusting the accelerator tight against the floorboard of the Excelsior Newsreel car.

"You know what I mean," said the little man hoarsely, puckering up his face in anxiety. He glanced uneasily from side to side, as though to make sure there was nobody else in the car. "This is the third one. And each of 'em said they were going to get us."

Snub Dugan broke off to fish in his pocket. He pulled out a crumpled scrap of paper and began to smooth it out.

"Ever since we took those pictures of the Rizzatti funeral," he continued huskily, "we been getting these threats. Remember?"

"Sure I remember," said Odds Mingo casually. "And I remember the bawling-out Monty Frew gave me for not bringing back those pictures, too."

"But Monk threatened to bump us off, Odds! He'd have done it right there, if the cops hadn't come. He'll do it yet. You know Monk Rizzatti's reputation. Why, he runs most of the rackets in New York."

Odds Mingo, ace stunt man of Excelsior Newsreels, shrugged indifferently. He thrived on danger. It was his profession. Whenever a ship sank at sea, or a fire broke out, it was always the imperturbable Mingo who drew the assignment to make the pictures. Now he grinned at the little man's anxiety. Snub didn't have any relish for dangerous jobs. Yet the little man had risked his life a dozen times, out of loyalty to Mingo. The big cameraman elbowed his companion in the ribs.

"Forget it," he advised. "We're not after Monk Rizzatti's picture today. We gotta shoot a bunch of nags runnin' around a track, worse luck."

Snub Dugan relaxed slowly and settled back against the cushions. If Odds Mingo said there was nothing to worry about,

then he wasn't going to worry. He tore open a package of cigarettes and lit one.

AFTER awhile they turned off into the drive leading to Belgrave Park. The big car came to a slithering stop. Odds Mingo pummeled the horn. In answer to its summons, a bent old man hobbled over to the car.

Mingo leaned out the window. "Where'll I get the best shots from, Charley?"

The aged gatekeeper lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"Down by the finish line," he said mysteriously.

"I know that." Odds Mingo spat between his teeth. "But I want you to tip me off, if there's any important big shots out here today."

Charley stopped chewing his tobacco cud long enough to grin toothlessly. "There's *one* guy here today. A very important big shot in the number racket, he is. Only he don't like his picture taken."

Snub Dugan winced.

"Never mind that," said Mingo. "What's he look like? And what's his name?"

"Patsy Klein, and he's wearing a pearl gray derby." Charley grinned again. "I ain't told none of the other boys, but I know you ain't very particular about when you die, Odds."

The big sound truck rolled slowly away from the gate. Belgrave Park was packed with thousands of milling, noisy human beings. The car had to thread its way among them carefully. Mingo swore. Then they were past the grandstand and the crowd had thinned out considerably.

Mingo ran the machine up on top of a little knoll, some sixty feet back from the finish line, so he could make some good angle-shots of the entire track. There was only a small cluster of figures standing in

front of the newsreel men at the fence. Otherwise the space between the sound truck and the finish line was clear.

Mingo got out and climbed up on top of the car. Snub Dugan opened up the back of the sound truck and handed the heavy newsreel camera to Mingo. The cameraman made it fast to the top of the truck, unrolled the cable that was wrapped around the tripods, and tossed it down on the ground.

"Get a move on, Snub!" he yelled. "Couple this cable up to the juice, so's I can get started and make some color shots of the crowd before the race begins."

Snub Dugan brought out a short length of cable wire and plugged it to the cable attached to the camera. Then he went back inside the truck and squatted down by the control levers. After he put his earphones on, he threw the power switches and the two motors started to whirl. When they had attained the same speed, he threw another switch. This last served to synchronize the sound track and the sight track of the film, which were to be recorded concurrently but separately; one in the camera outside, and the other inside the sound truck.

Snub raised his voice above the sound of the crowd. "All set!" he yelled.

Mingo got behind his camera and focused the lenses. Then he pressed his control and began shooting. For awhile he swung the camera from side to side on its swivel axis, taking in the spectators in the grandstand, the horses prancing about on the track. Then he pointed the camera at the finish line, remembering Charley's tip. He saw a pearl-gray derby. So that was Patsy Klein, the big numbers king! The racketeer was talking excitedly to a thin man in a cap. They seemed to be quarrelling.

Suddenly the man in the cap turned, and Mingo saw his face. It was Monk Rizzatti.

For a moment the cameraman stared. Then he leaned over the back of the truck.

"Hey, Snub!" he snapped. "Can you pick up any talking on your mike?"

Snub twisted the knobs on his control board for a moment. Then he shook his head. "No go," he replied. "I've got 'em wide open now." He took one earphone off and squinted up, puzzled. "What's the matter?"

"Rizzatti's here!"

"Rizzatti!" Snub Dugan dropped his earphones in alarm. "He . . . he hasn't seen you, has he?"

"Not yet." Mingo leaned farther over the end of the truck, and a little paper package fell out of his shirt pocket on to the ground. The cameraman saw it fall. He motioned to Dugan. "Hand me that package of flash powder."

Snub Dugan reached it up to him with trembling fingers.

"But, Odds," he said hoarsely, "what are you going to do?"

"Take his picture, of course!" Mingo snapped. "And this time it's going in the newsreels."

Snub Dugan shivered at the memory of his other meeting with Monk Rizzatti. "He'll kill us, Odds!" he cried. "Don't do it!"

Mingo laughed shortly. "Nothing short of a bullet'll stop me this time. Just leave it to me, Snub."

THE cameraman went back to his camera. Snub watched him go, struggling between his fear of the gangster and his loyalty to his friend. He rubbed the palms of his hands nervously on the front of his trousers. He shivered at the thought of what would happen to them if the mob leader discovered what they were doing.

Mingo had swung his lens on the little group of figures huddled around Monk Rizzatti and Patsy Klein. The two men

stood close together, in the center of the human circle, arguing angrily. Mingo strained his ears, but he could not make out what they were saying.

Then the cameraman saw the horses walking into the barrier. The starter raised his gun high. At the same instant Mingo looked through his sighter and saw that he had a swell profile shot of the two gangsters. He started shooting. The barrier was at an angle alongside Rizzatti, so the cameraman saw he could get the start at the same time.

Then several things happened so fast that they seemed to occur at the same time. The starter's gun went off, the barrier raised, the horses broke. But Mingo's eyes did not see these things. They were glued on Rizzatti and his companion.

At the instant the starter fired his gun, Monk Rizzatti had whipped out a revolver. He thrust it against the side of the man in the pearl-grey derby and fired point-blank. Patsy Klein jerked suddenly as the steel tore into his body. His hat fell from his head and went rolling along the turf. Then his arms dropped to his side. He sagged limply.

Rizzatti grabbed the dead man under the arms as he crumpled up. The gang leader held him that way, barking orders at his strongarm men.

Mingo felt a tingle along his spine. He realized in a flash what had happened. He was witnessing a murder with his own eyes. What was more, he was recording a motion picture of that murder as it was being enacted.

Nobody around the track had noticed the shot. The starter's gun had covered that up well enough. The crowd was rooting lustily for the favorite. They had eyes for nothing outside the pounding hooves on the track.

The cameraman realized suddenly that he had a scoop. And what a story! When

Monty Frew, the assignment editor saw this in the screening room. . . . Why, it was probably the first time in newsreel history for a gang murder to be recorded on the spot! Mingo concentrated all his attention on following the action, on getting every bit of it down on that rapidly moving strip of film.

Down there, by the rail, the gangsters were moving slowly, apparently aimlessly, but actually in accordance with a prearranged plan. As Rizzatti yelled, two of his hoods sauntered over and helped him with Klein, as though the latter were only drunk. Others rooted for the horses loudly, slapped each other on the back. But Mingo noticed that they took care to block the view of any of the crowd that might happen to glance in that direction.

One of the thugs unfolded a wooden chair quickly and set it on the ground. The two hoods holding the dead man lowered him carefully on to it. Then they arranged him in a natural sitting position and placed his hat on his head, pulling the brim forward so that it cast a shadow over the victim's face. Then Rizzatti and his hoods turned and slowly sauntered off.

It had all been arranged very skillfully. No one in the crowd had noticed anything out of the ordinary. If they happened to glance there, they would see only what appeared to be a drunk, slouched in the chair.

The gangsters were moving on a diagonal line that would bring them past the knoll, only a few feet to the side of the sound truck. Mingo waited until he had got a few feet of straight-on shots of their faces. It would be a cinch to identify them when the film was projected on the screen. Then he leaned over the back of the sound truck.

"Snub!" he called. "Snub! Rizzatti just shot a guy. That fellow, Klein. And I caught it all with the camera!"

Snub Dugan stared at his friend blankly.

"Don'tcha understand, Snub?" Mingo raised his voice in his excitement. "I got a picture of a real murder, just as it happened! There's enough on that strip of film to send the whole gang of 'em to the electric chair! And we got the scoop of the century!"

Suddenly the little wizened sound man realized what Mingo was saying. His fingers fumbled nervously with his lips.

"Did—did they see you?" he stammered uneasily.

"Naw. They were much too busy covering up."

Snub's wrinkled face looked white and drawn. In spite of all his efforts, sheer undiluted fear crept into his mild blue eyes.

"Quick!" he stuttered. "We gotta get outta here, Odds!"

"Okay," said Mingo exuberantly. "I got all I want now."

He turned to get his camera. Then he saw that the mobsters were only twenty feet away now. The temptation to get a close-up was too much for the cameraman. He bent down quickly.

"Keep the power on, Snub," he ordered. "And open your board up wide. You can pick 'em up—now."

Snub Dugan squatted down again at the control board with his earphones clamped tight on his head. Mingo had barely pressed his release button, when one of the gangsters looked up. The fellow nudged Monk Rizzatti. The mob leader eyed Mingo for a moment. Then he motioned his followers after him and turned towards the sound truck.

MINGO realized that Rizzatti would probably recognize him, if indeed he had not already done so. But the cameraman was determined to get as much

footage of this unique film as possible. He threw one arm casually over his camera, so that he could keep the lens focused on the gangsters without appearing to take their pictures.

Rizzatti had his right hand on the gun in his pocket. He motioned toward the cameraman with the edge of his coat.

"Get him down off there," he snarled out of the corner of his mouth.

One of the hoods pulled his gun out and climbed up on the automobile's fender and jabbed the muzzle into Mingo's back. The cameraman realized he was outnumbered. He climbed slowly down to ground. There was still a chance that he might bluff it out.

"What's the idea?" he said, pretending ignorance. "I wasn't doing anything."

Two of the hoods closed in on him from behind and grabbed his arms. Monk Rizzatti stared coldly at him. The thin scar that ran from his left nostril to the edge of his mouth shone whitely.

"So," he said slowly. "Still tryin' to take pictures of me, eh? Well, you ought to know better, mug. There ain't anybody gonna take pictures of Monk Rizzatti. Not today, anyway."

"Aw, what do you mean?" asked Mingo coolly. "I didn't even know you were here, Rizzatti. I was shootin' the race for the newsreels."

Monk Rizzatti laughed mirthlessly. "Well, them pictures ain't gonna get in the newsreel, see? I ain't takin' no chances on bein' seen around here today. Not much."

The gangster's eyes flicked past the cameraman to where the still form of Patsy Klein sat slumped in the chair. Mingo's eyes unconsciously followed the other's glance. Rizzatti noticed it. He laughed hollowly.

"Yeah," he said harshly. "Patsy Klein was tryin' to muscle in on the numbers racket. He bothered me. Just like you do."

And I'm gonna see that you don't bother me no more, too."

Mingo opened his mouth to reply. A hard hand clamped over it. The mob leader looked up at the camera on top of the truck.

"Get that camera off there!" he snapped.

Two of the hoods climbed up. They unfastened the tripods and hauled the camera over the edge of the truck. Mingo thought fast. He got his mouth free from the gagging hand.

"Cut the camera switch!" he yelled to Dugan. "We're licked."

The two hoods pushed the camera off. It fell heavily on the ground. Monk Rizzatti jerked his head at them.

"Bust it open," he snapped. "I want that film ruined!"

One of the gangsters opened the back of the camera where it lay. For several minutes he wrestled with the inside of the machine. Mingo smiled grimly. The back plate was screwed tight. They wouldn't get it off in a hurry. Until they did, the film was safe. If only there was some way of saving that film! His mind worked desperately

It was dark inside the truck. The gangsters hadn't noticed Snub Dugan yet. The little man was trembling, for fear they would see what he was doing. But he had to do it. It was their only chance.

Rizzatti was getting impatient. "Shake the lead out, you guys!" he clipped. "We gotta get back to Manhattan to make this alibi hold. We ain't got much time. Bust it open!"

The two hoods pulled out a couple of short lengths of lead pipe and began smashing the camera. After a few blows, the plate broke and they jimmied the pieces off. One of them reached in and got the spool containing the exposed film. He cut it free, and holding one end of the film,

hurled the spool down the little hill. It rolled rapidly and the film spun out behind it.

Mingo was raging with anger. He had taken a unique picture, an actual murder as it happened—and now they had ruined his film. There wouldn't be one good frame left out of the four hundred odd he had taken. He thought of the scathing things Monty Frew would say about losing a picture like this.

In spite of his callousness to danger, Odds Mingo felt a cold chill run up his spine. He was used to taking chances, sure. But this began to look more like cold-blooded murder.

As Rizzatti started past the back of the sound truck, Snub Dugan swung at him with a monkey-wrench. Rizzatti ducked quickly. Whirling around, gun in hand, he brought the barrel down on the little man's head with crushing impact. Dugan gasped once. Then he slipped on to the ground.

"Bring him along," said Rizzatti and started toward the gate. Two of the hoods supported the dazed sound man between them, as though he were just drunk. The other two gangsters pressed close on either side of Mingo.

MINGO'S mind was working feverishly. If only he could make somebody, just one person in all that crowd, realize what was happening. But that was just it; it looked as though nothing out of the ordinary were happening. The little group was moving leisurely toward the gate. All that vast crowd, all those thousands of people, had their backs turned to them. Their eyes were on the track. The second race was just starting.

Mingo had thought of nothing yet, when they reached the gate. And then he saw Charley. The old fellow's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"Leavin' already, Odds?" he called.

"Yeah," Odds spoke deliberately. "We're goin' for a little ride with our friends here."

He felt the cold round ring of a gun in his back and quickened his pace. Behind him the gateman stared puzzledly.

Once outside the gate, Rizzatti and his men moved swiftly. They rushed the two newsreel men into a big closed limousine parked nearby.

One of the mob climbed behind the wheel and the huge car spurred forward onto the highway. Then another of the gangsters thrust his gun against Mingo's temple.

"Shall I give it to them now, boss?" he asked. "We can toss 'em into a ditch."

Rizzatti reached back from the front seat and struck the revolver from the hood's hand.

"You fool!" he snarled. "We ain't got time for that now. I don't want any slipup on this alibi of mine, when the dicks start askin' who bumped off Patsy Klein. We already wasted too much time. We ought to be over at the hang-out now."

Mingo's brain swam dizzily, but through the mist of pain he realized with a cold chill that there was no doubt whatsoever about the fate in store for them.

As the car swept over the concrete highway, the gangsters took some strong rope out of a side-pocket and bound the arms of their two victims. The limousine continued on across the Queensborough Bridge, ziz-zagged across Manhattan, and slid to a stop in front of a swanky Riverside Drive apartment house.

Monk Rizzatti and two of his hoods got out and jerked the two newsreel men out with them. The big car shot away up the drive with the other gangsters. They shoved a gun in Mingo's back and made him walk around to the service elevator.

They had to half-carry Dugan between them. He was still out cold.

THE apartment on the tenth floor was like something out of a moving-picture set. Mingo had heard about the Rizzatti show-place. Who hadn't? But he could hardly believe his eyes now that he was actually there.

One of the gang took a final puff on his cigarette, threw it on the rug, and started to grind it out with his heel. Rizzatti wheeled on him. His fist shot out and clipped the hood on the jaw. The man reeled in surprise.

"How many times," the mob-leader grated, "did I tell you to cut that out? That rug ain't no ash tray, Joe. Why, it set me back four grand!"

Joe slowly picked up the butt and put it in a silver ash tray on the Venetian marble table. Then he jerked his thumb at the two newsreel men lying on the thick carpet.

"What about these mugs?" he asked.

"Take 'em in the next room," ordered Rizzatti. "It'll be good and dark in a coupla hours, and then we can give 'em the works and make it look like an accident."

"Mebbe we oughtta bump 'em off now," protested the hood. "You don't want anybody to find these lugs here."

Rizzatti laughed hollowly. "We got plenty of time. Nobody saw me out at the track. And when the dicks start thinking about who blotted Klein, and come here, I got a perfect alibi. They won't find these mugs, cause they won't be here. By that time they'll be lying out in the street somewhere."

Joe dumped the two men in the room indicated and shut the door. As he lay on the thick carpet, Mingo heard Rizzatti and the men in the other room talking in low tones for a few minutes. Then they went out.

Odds Mingo's thoughts went whirling through his head. The chances of rescue were slight. No one had seen them leave. No one but Charley. And whether he had realized their plight or could do anything about it if he had, Mingo didn't know.

Mingo rolled over on his side, and saw that Dugan was still out. He could get no help from that direction. As he moved, something hard in his shirt-pocket pressed against his chest. Suddenly he got an idea.

Keeping his back to the gangster, Mingo worked his hands around until his straining fingers got what they were after. His hands were tied only at the wrists.

Holding the hard object between his palms, Mingo struggled to a sitting position on the rug. The hood eyed him suspiciously. The cameraman tried a grin. His face felt stiff and unnatural.

"How about a smoke, pal?" he asked.

"Nothing doing."

"Aw, hell!" pleaded Mingo. "Be a sport. I'm dying for a smoke."

The hood saw that the cameraman's hands were trembling. He laughed in enjoyment of his victim's suffering. "I tell you what, pal," he said leering. "I'll smoke a cigarette and let you watch."

He put a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and held a match to it. Just as he was about to drop it on the rug, he stopped and looked around the room. There were no ash trays. He looked at the expensive rug again. Then he raised one leg and put the match in his trouser cuff.

Mingo wriggled desperately, as the smoke floated tantalizingly past his nose. Then Mingo jerked his head at the still form nearby him.

"I guess he's hurt pretty bad," he said. "How about letting me see what I can do for him?"

The hood got up and came over slowly. "I'll show you what to do for him," he said nastily and kicked the

unconscious sound man in the ribs. Then he stooped and began roughly slapping Dugan's face.

Mingo edged nearer. He reached his hands out and let the stuff he was holding trickle into the gangster's trouser cuff.

"C'mon, wake up!" he yelled, using his fist on Dugan. "You ain't dead—yet."

The little wizened man opened his eyes slowly. The shock of the slapping had brought him to. He shook his head dazedly. The hood laughed brutally and went back to his chair.

Mingo's eyes were glued on the guard. As he sat, puffing away on his cigarette. Then the ash suddenly grew too long and fell off on the rug. The hood swore softly and glanced around involuntarily. He rubbed the ashes carefully in the nap of the rug and went back smoking with a satisfied air.

Suddenly the cameraman's straining ears heard the elevator stopping in the hall outside and the soft sound of voices. He squirmed in anxiety. The mobsters were returning. In a few minutes all hope of escape would be gone.

The hood heard the noises, too. He got up swiftly and whipped out his gun. Then he noticed his cigarette had burned a short ash again. He reached down with his fingers and flicked the end of the cigarette so the ash would drop in his trouser cuff.

There was a loud report as a spark touched off the flash powder in his cuff. The hood's trouser leg burst into fire. He let out a yell of pain, and dropped his revolver to use both hands to slap out the burning cloth. The smoke from the flash powder blinded him and made him cough.

Mingo jumped to his feet and dove for the gun. He got it between his hands and curled his fingers around the trigger.

"Reach high!" he snapped. "Or I'll drill you!"

BLINDED by the smoke and pain, the hood raised his hands. He had beaten the fire out, but the flames had burned through the cloth and the skin underneath it.

Outside Mingo heard running footsteps. He motioned with the gun to his dazed friend.

"Untie him," he ordered.

The hood's burned fingers fumbled with the ropes for a second and finally untied them. Mingo took a step towards the gangster and then kicked. The point of his shoe caught the man under the chin and snapped his head back.

And then the door opened. A hand showed in the doorway with a gun. Mingo fired. There was a howl and the hand dropped the gun.

"Grab it, Snub!" he yelled, and jumped through the doorway, still holding his gat in both hands.

In the next room were Monk Rizzatti and one of his hoods. Rizzatti whipped his gun out and fired. Mingo felt a flash of fire in his left arm. Then his own gun spurted flame. One of the slugs splintered Rizzatti's wrist, and his arm sagged limply at his side. The other gangster still had his hand inside his coat when Mingo's bullet went home. He dropped to his knees and coughed up blood.

"You ain't got anything pinned on me," Rizzatti whined, holding his hands high.

"Only murder!" Odds Mingo's face was grim. "I shot the whole thing.

"You can't prove it! I got a perfect alibi! Anyway that film's spoiled!"

Snub Dugan's hands were free, but he was clutching his revolver with both of them, as though he might drop it.

"Yeah, but we still got you, Rizzatti!" his shrill voice mounted triumphantly.

"You thought you ruined our pictures. But you didn't! All you spoiled was the sight track. What you didn't know was that when we use a sound truck, we take sight and sound on *two separate strips of film.*"

The blood drained slowly from Monk Rizzatti's face. His ratlike eyes darted from face to face.

"You mean you kept the sound track going all the time?" Mingo burst out excitedly.

"Sure!" Snub Dugan's small chest swelled with pride. "I cut the camera switch, so's they wouldn't stall my other motor when they busted your box up. I got everything he said!"

"I didn't say nothing," whined Rizzatti, his face ashen.

Suddenly several blue-uniformed figures poured into the room from the hall. The lieutenant at the head of them had his revolver out.

"We got here in time!" he ripped out. "The gatekeeper out at Belgrave phoned the *Excelsior* office that something was wrong there. Mr. Frew went out with us and found your cameras all smashed up, and—"

"But what about the sound track?" Snub burst in excitedly. "Was *it* all right?"

"All right?" The lieutenant laughed. "It was perfect. That's the way we found you. Frew had it developed and run off in the projection room. Monk here said plenty. Enough to put him right where he belongs. On the hot seat!"

Odds Mingo nudged his pal in the ribs with one elbow.

"Well," he said, grinning broadly. "Maybe the people in the theatres won't be able to see the first newsreel picture of a murder, but it's a cinch they'll hear all about it, thanks to you, Snub."