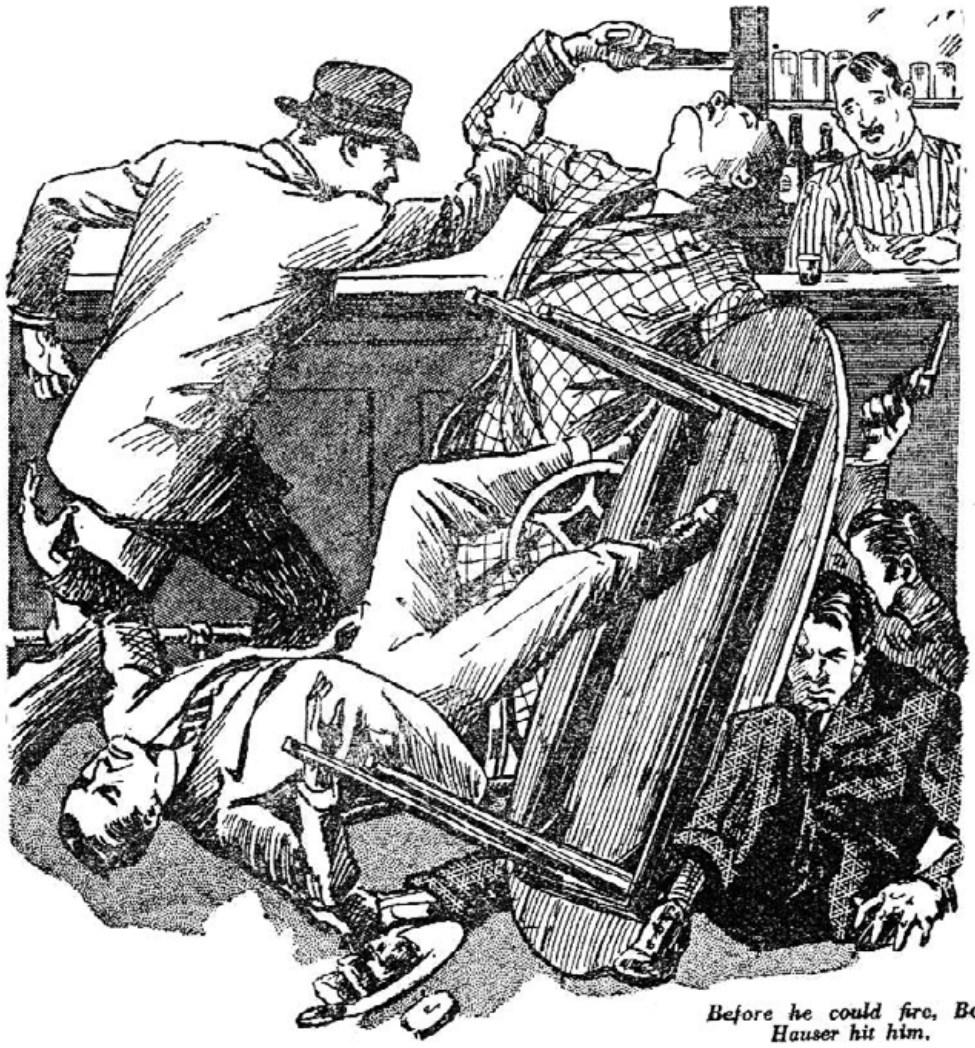
Ten Detective Aces, March, 1937

Posed by the Reaper



Before he could fire, Ben Hauser hit him.

By Ralph Powers
Author of "Receipt for Murder," etc.

The chance of breaking the clever killer's alibi hung by a hair. But Inspector Ben Hauser played that chance against the whole police department—even though it might mean his own scalp.

I SAW the crowd in front of the restaurant, got off the bus at the corner and walked back, elbowing my way to the front rank. When I got there, I saw Ben Hauser talking to a little guy with a pale face. People were edging as close to them as they could without stepping into the blood that was smeared on the sidewalk. I slipped between a couple of men, who growled at me and gave me a dirty look, then found my way blocked by a woman whose arms were full of packages. I couldn't get around her so I called out: "Hi, Ben. Who got it this time?"

He turned and looked at me. He was a big man with heavy shoulders, a thick neck and a broad face. There was a scowl on his face. It deepened the lines around his eyes and his mouth and made him look older than he really was. He didn't see me at first, but when he did, he said: "Oh, it's you, Spic. How did you get here so soon?"

"Part of my job," I shot back.

The woman with all the bundles moved a little and I edged closer. "Who was it, Ben?"

He said: "Nick Rocco."

I whistled. Nick Rocco was a mighty square guy. He had plenty of friends. His Kentucky Club out at the edge of the city did a land-office business. The food was good and so was the entertainment. Rocco had been making plenty of money, but he wasn't tight with it. I knew of a couple of likely young chaps who were going to school on his "scholarships," to say nothing of the hundreds of pocket loans he made every year.

"Bad?" I asked.

Ben Hauser nodded. "Finished, I think. They took him to the hospital, but from what I gather I don't think he's got a chance."

"Who did it?"

Hauser said: "Hell, Spic, if I knew who did it, do you think I'd be standin' around here?" He turned to Tom Kyle and Eddie Brumbaugh, two of the men who had come out from headquarters with him, and said: "Get the names and addresses of these people, will you?" Then he stalked over to the door of the restaurant, pushed it open and went inside. I followed him.

Excepting for the help, the restaurant was pretty deserted. There were a couple of overturned tables, and the door that led to the kitchen was hanging by one hinge. Apparently the people who had been dining when Rocco was shot hadn't wasted any time getting out.

I saw Ben Hauser walk up to a thin, pale-faced guy who was nervously fingering his tie, and heard him say: "Who was Rocco with today?"

The man shook his head. "I—I don't know."

"Where did he sit?" "Over there." The man pointed toward a table.

Hauser and I both headed for it. We both saw the handkerchief at the same time. We reached for it together, but I was a little quicker. I got it, read the initials in the corner and then handed it to him, trying to look, innocent. Ben Hauser grabbed it. He said:

"Damn you, Spic. Will you keep your hands off of things, or do I have to get rough?" Then he looked at the initials.

I said: "L.D., Ben. Might stand for Last Day."

He nodded. "It might stand for Lida Dean, too."

That was fast thinking for a cop, but Ben Hauser wasn't any ordinary cop. When he had been named head of the homicide squad a week before, old Quigley, my city editor, had wanted to know who the blanked-blanked hell Ben Hauser was. I told him that Hauser was a little surprise package that the powers that be in the city wouldn't get over in a hurry. I had known him for a long time, but he wasn't a guy that got into the papers very often. He didn't like publicity. He had told me once that he figured his job was to do things, not to talk about them or read about them in the papers. He did things, too, and his tagging those initials onto Lida Dean was a sample of the way his mind worked. Lida Dean was a featured entertainer in Rocco's Kentucky Club.

I SAID: "You'll want to see her."

He nodded. "Rocco had just stepped out the door when he got it. There was a woman with him. She beat it, got a cab.

Apparently she wasn't hurt."

"But she saw the men who shot him."

"She must have."

"Then she'll be blowing, Ben."

"She'll have to blow mighty fast." He started for the door.

"Wait." I grabbed his arm. "Do you know where she lives?"

"I'll find out."

"That might take too long. I can get the address in a minute over the telephone."

He scowled at me.

I saw a phone booth across the room, went over there, spent a nickel and shot in a story of what had happened. The flash had just reached the paper, but the bare details that I was able to add made Quigley almost purr. Then I had him switch me to Doc Froman. Doc was a sports editor, but a part of his interest in sports centered in night clubs. He knew all the spots and most of the entertainers. He gave me Lida Dean's address and said: "It won't do you no good, Spic. You're too old."

I told him where he could go and hung up, turned back to Hauser and said: "Come along. I got it."

He said: "So that's it. Where do you get this 'come along' stuff?"

I saw a beat for my sheet if I worked it right, but I knew that I'd have to hurry. The boys from the other papers would be out soon. That I just happened to be riding past in a bus was a real break.

I said: "Come on, Ben. I just want to tag along. I'll be good."

He hesitated. "You sure you have the correct address?"

"Positive. An' we better hurry. It won't take her long to pack."

For a moment the scowl stayed on his face, then I saw a grin break through, and he said: "All right, Spic, but if you get in my hair it's gonna go tough on you."

We went outside and he picked up Eddie Brumbaugh. Then we went over and got into a squad car. Brumbaugh slid back of the wheel. "Where to?" he asked.

I said: "West. I'll tell you where to turn."

Brumbaugh frowned but Hauser said: "It'll O.K., Eddie. We'll dump him later."

When we reached the apartment house where Lida Dean was living, Ben Hauser hunted up the janitor, flashed his shield, and had the janitor go upstairs with us. When there wasn't any answer to our ring, Hauser borrowed the janitor's key. He unlocked the door and shoved it open, and we all barged in. Lida Dean was there, all right. She was standing, pale-faced, in one corner of the room. There was a gun in her hand. At first she didn't know who we were, for she pointed it at us and said: "If you come a step farther I'll shoot."

We stopped, and Ben Hauser said: "It's the cops, lady. Take it easy."

An expression of relief passed over her face, and she lowered the gun.

Hauser said: "You saw it, didn't you?"

She nodded. "I saw it."

"Why did you run?"

For a moment she didn't answer him. She just stood there, looking at him, a slight frown on her face. She was tall, thin. Her eyes were very dark, and her skin had an olive tinge. She had full lips and even, white teeth that showed when she smiled. But she wasn't smiling now.

She said, finally: "You'd run, too, if I'd tell you."

THAT was enough for me. I guess it was enough for Ben Hauser, too. I saw his eyes narrow and I thought that he must be thinking of the same man as I. Then a stony expression came over his face and he said:

"Who was he?"

Lida Dean shook her head.

"Maybe," Hauser suggested, "you don't think enough of Rocco to name his

murderer."

That got her. She looked away and said: "Nick Rocco picked me up out of a lousy beer garden in Chicago, gave me a chance; treated me like a lady. I—I'd do a lot for him."

"Then name the man who killed him."

A bitter smile twisted her lips. "Why? What would you do?"

"You leave that to me," Ben Hauser snapped. "Who was it?"

She looked at him again, more carefully, then she threw a name at him, suddenly and without any warning.

"Frank Hess."

Maybe she thought that he would quail at the mention of that name. A good many people have. But Ben Hauser only nodded and said: "I thought so. Get a good look at him?"

She said: "So good a look that I'm getting out of town as fast as I can."

Hauser moved over to a telephone across the room. He gave a number and when he got his connection, he asked that a couple of men be sent out to the apartment to pick up Lida Dean. Then he hung up and turned back to her. Her face seemed more pale than when we had first come into the room. She crossed over to where he stood and took his arm.

"You can't do that," she said. "You can't do that."

"But I have," he told her.

"He—he'll kill me."

"No he won't. We'll take care of that."

She shook her head, stubbornly. "I'll never admit on a witness stand what I told you. Even—even Nick wouldn't expect me to do that."

Ben Hauser shook off her arm. He turned to Eddie Brumbaugh and said: "Eddie, you stick here until the men get here from headquarters. Book her as a material witness. I'm takin' the car."

Brumbaugh nodded, and I saw him feel for his gun. He didn't look like he felt any too well.

Hauser started for the door, and I got in his way.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"Where do you think?" he snapped. "I'm going out to arrest Frank Hess."

I shook my head. "For Pete's sake, Ben, use your head."

He glared at me. "You heard what she said, didn't you?"

I nodded.

"Well, get out of my way."

I said: "Look here, Ben, Hess'll have a dozen men who will give him an alibi. The girl will back down on you. Then where will you be? Don't make a fool of yourself."

He said again: "You heard what she said, didn't you?"

"But—but you don't just go out and arrest men like Frank Hess."

He laughed, grimly. "The hell you don't, Spic. Watch an' see. He may be quite a guy to you an' to some others in this town, but to me he's just a murdering heel. Get outta my way."

He reached out and pushed me aside, jerked open the door and went out.

I looked over at Eddie Brumbaugh. Brumbaugh frowned. He said: "When Ben gets his dander up there's hell to pay; but he's bitin' off a mighty big chunk this time."

I grunted, said: "You watch the girl." Then I hurried after Ben Hauser, but I didn't make it to the street in time. The squad car was gone.

I STOPPED by the office and went in to see Quigley. He scowled at me, shouted:

"What are you doin' here? Rocco's dead—we just got word from the hospital. I want a statement from the police commissioner, from the Chief, from this new guy on the homicide squad. I want to

know what—"

"You want to know who," I interrupted. "Well, it was Frank Hess. Think that over for a while."

"What!"

I nodded. "Positive identification."

He whistled, grabbed a telephone and shouted into it, "Stop the presses." Then he whirled on me. "What's the story?"

I said: "Let the presses go ahead. You won't print it." Then I told him about Lida Dean.

When I finished, he said: "That all you got?"

I nodded. "Hauser's gone to arrest Hess."

"What is he, a fool?"

"Not a fool. Just a very determined man."

Quigley grunted. He said: "You get back to headquarters. Phone me when Hauser turns in his resignation."

I went on back to headquarters, feeling a good deal like Quigley felt. Frank Hess wouldn't be pulled in on anything as shaky as a girl's identification, especially when you could bank on her to back down. Hauser might get him, bring him in, but there was even some question about that. Frank Hess was a strange man. He didn't court publicity. He wouldn't like being arrested, even if he had an iron-clad alibi.

When I got down to headquarters, almost the first man I saw was Eddie Brumbaugh. I went up to him and said: "Get her in all right?"

He shook his head, looked a little sheepish. "She got away."

"Got away?" He nodded, but didn't look me in the eye.

I said: "Hell, Eddie, don't expect me to believe that one. You let her go, didn't you?"

He scowled at me, grated: "She got away, I tell you. I turned my back for a minute to let her change her dress. She sneaked out."

"Think Hauser will believe that?"

He said, stubbornly, "It's a break for Hauser, if he only knew it. A break for the girl, too."

I didn't get to answer him, for just then Hauser came in. He looked across the room at Eddie Brumbaugh. There was an expression on his face that I didn't like. Then he spoke and his voice cracked like a whip.

"Eddie, come here."

Brumbaugh turned around and saw him. His face tightened, and he walked forward. There were several other men in the room. At a table several were playing rummy. The game stopped, and everyone looked over to where Brumbaugh faced Ben Hauser.

Hauser said: "So you're yellow, huh?"

Brumbaugh shook his head. "She got away, Ben."

"She did like hell. You let her go. You're afraid of Frank Hess—on his payroll, maybe."

Brumbaugh flushed. He said: "That's a lie, Ben."

I saw Ben Hauser's fists double, could see his body trembling. I thought that in another moment one of those huge fists would crash out and send Brumbaugh reeling back across the room. But I was wrong. Instead, Hauser's shoulders slumped and he said, in a tired voice: "Get out, Eddie. Get out of my sight. You make me sick. I never want to see you again."

Eddie Brumbaugh turned and stumbled from the room. A moment of deep silence followed his exit. The other men avoided looking at Ben Hauser's face.

Ben Hauser looked around at them slowly. They were all old-timers. Some of them had started out with him as a cop. He knew them well, knew all about them; but now, as he looked at them, I could see by the expression in his eyes that he wasn't

sure that he knew them at all.

He walked, finally, over to the table where the rummy game had been going on. The men there were on his squad. Jimmie Tait, Keno Johnson, Walter Evans and Slim Buzatti. He said to them: "Well, where do you line up?"

Jimmie Tait got to his feet. He said: "What do you want me to do, Ben?"

Hauser shook his head. He said: "Frank Hess killed Nick Rocco. I know it. The only witness who could give a positive identification is gone. But that doesn't make any difference to me. I'm goin' after Hess. Who can I count on?"

Tait said: "I asked you what you wanted me to do, didn't I?"

A grin came to Hauser's face. He said: "Thanks, Jimmie." Then the grin went away, and he looked at the other three men.

They didn't speak at once, and he said, sharply: "Well?"

Evans said: "Now Ben, don't get us wrong. But you can't just go out and arrest a man unless you can prove—"

Hauser's harsh laugh cut him off. He said: "That'll do, Evans." Then he turned and stalked out of the room. Jimmie Tait followed him, and I trailed along.

When we got to the cubby-hole that Hauser called his office, he turned to me and said: "Who the hell asked you to come along, Spic?"

"No one, Ben," I answered. "I just came."

"Maybe you think I'm a fool, too."

I nodded. "Sure you are." I sat down in one of the two chairs in the room and leaned back.

He scowled at me for a minute, then said: "If I read anything in that lousy sheet of yours that ain't true, I'll forget how long I've known you, Spic."

"What about Hess?" I asked; "Didn't you find him?"

He shook his head. "But I found his alibi."

"Good one?" He nodded, slowly. "Too good. It's almost perfect. It seems that he was in a barber shop at the time Rocco was shot."

I frowned. "That'll be hard to break."

"Not so hard as you think. Come along."

WE went to a barber shop on the south side of the city. Hauser talked to the barber. The barber said that he knew Frank Hess, that he had worked on Hess that day, starting just at noon. He told all that he had done. It was plenty to keep a man in a chair for a couple of hours at least. And Ben Hauser made a list of all the things that the barber mentioned. He also got the names and addresses of other men who had been in there at the same time. The barber had all the information down pat, as though he had been expecting to be questioned.

When we left, I said to Hauser: "Hess wasn't in there but it's a good alibi."

He nodded. "Like I told you. Too good."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Break it."

"How?"

He turned to Jimmie Tait. "Jimmie," he said, "you get a picture of Hess' an' look up these men who were in the shop. See if they recognize it. That's the first step."

Tait nodded, took the list of names and left us. When he had gone I said: "They'll recognize the picture, Ben. Then what?"

"Then I want to see Frank Hess."

"Are you going to arrest him?"

He nodded. "Of course."

We went back to headquarters and when we got there, Hauser found a note on his desk asking him to come to the commissioner's office. I walked over with him and hung around outside while he was in talking to the commissioner. When he came out, his face was red and he was

perspiring.

"Well, what happened?" I asked him.

He glared at me, started to swear, and when he ran out of words, I said: "As bad as that?"

"Worse," he snapped.

"He called you off, didn't he?"

Hauser nodded.

I shrugged and said: "Well, that's that."

But Hauser shook his head. "Not by a damn sight, Spic. I'm still head of the homicide squad. It's still my case."

"You're going ahead with it?"

"Of course I am."

It was getting along toward six o'clock, and I left Ben Hauser at his desk and telephoned Quigley. He said things to me that weren't very nice. One of the other sheets had come out with a statement by the commissioner, promising drastic action against the murderer of Nick Rocco. I hadn't sent it in, didn't even know that the commissioner had made it.

Quigley asked: "What about that guy Hauser? Has he come to yet?"

I said: "He's all right."

"What do you mean, all right?"

"I'll tell you later," I said, and hung up. But I was a good deal worried about what I would have to tell Quigley later on.

I went out to get a bite to eat and when I came back, Ben Hauser was gone. He hadn't left any word as to where he was going, and after hanging around for a while, chewing my fingernails, I set out to try and find him. One after another I visited every bar in the city where I thought I might run across Frank Hess, for I had a hunch that Hauser would be looking for him, too.

Finally, I found Hess in a place called the Top Hat. There wasn't anything top hat about that joint but the name. It was on the East Side and was a pretty shady place. A couple of times the license had been revoked, and it had been closed. But it always opened up again.

There weren't many people there, and three of the four men with Frank Hess I recognized. They weren't men that a person would be proud to number among his acquaintances, unless he had a lot of enemies and needed help. All of those three had police records. One had just recently been released from prison; one had been tried for murder. The third was a skinny-faced gunman who had drifted in from the East a couple of years before.

Hess didn't usually go around with such men. The recognized head of the underworld, he generally avoided its members in public. Seeing them with him tonight worried me. It could only mean one thing: Hess knew that Hauser was after him—and he was ready.

WHILE I was wondering what I should do, the door opened—and Ben Hauser came in. He saw those men at once. His face tightened. They saw him and stopped talking, turned to stare at him. I saw a couple of the men's hands drop out of sight under the table.

Ben Hauser must have noticed that, too. He must have seen the tension in the group. But if he did he didn't give any indication of it. He just walked up to the table and said: "I want you, Hess."

Frank Hess was a thin, dark-complexioned man. He had dark, slick hair, deep eyes and lips that smiled easily. They smiled now, and he said: "Hello, Ben. Have a chair?"

Hauser shook his head. "I want you Hess. Come along."

The smile left Frank Hess' face. He shook his head and said something so low that I couldn't catch it. I moved closer, saw Hauser pale, heard him say: "I ought to knock your teeth down your throat for that."

Hess said: "Now, take it easy Ben.

Let's talk this over."

Ben Hauser's fist came up so fast that I didn't see the blow until it crashed against Hess's jaw. Then, at the same time he lifted his foot and jammed it against the table, shoving hard. Hess went over, his chair tilting backwards, and the table bowled over two of the other men. A gun went off, slamming a bullet into the ceiling. I threw myself forward, grabbing for the arm of one of the men who was standing and who had his gun out. I reached him just before he fired, managed to jar his arm, and the bullet intended for Hauser went into the bar. He jerked loose, but before he could fire again, Ben Hauser hit him. He wasn't interested in firing a gun after· that.

The fight was short and didn't amount to much more. One of the men ducked out of it and left by the back door, along with the other customers in the place. The other four joined Hess on the floor. When it was over, Ben Hauser had some bruised knuckles and a grin on his face.

He said: "Thanks, Spic. How did you get here?"

I looked down at Hess. The side of his face was already swollen. "You've done it now," I said.

"Done what?"

"Look at his face."

"It's a murderer's face. I didn't hit it hard enough."

"You've got to prove that he's a murderer. Remember his alibi."

Hauser's grin didn't leave his face. He said: "Look at him, Spic, an' remember his alibi."

I looked down at Hess. He looked like a man usually looks just after a haircut.

I said: "Well?"

"Look close," Hauser insisted.

I looked closer but still didn't see anything.

Hauser said: "Remember all the things that barber said he did to him. He said, among other things, that he gave him a hair singe. 'Well, look at that hair."

I looked. Hess's hair wasn't singed.

Hauser said: "I'm takin' him in, Spic. You can tell your paper that."

"It isn't enough, alone."

"It's enough to question his alibi, to arrest him on. I'll get more."

He sounded so sure of himself that I began to wonder if perhaps I hadn't been wrong. But the next morning things looked different. I read what the early editions of the paper had to say and then went down to headquarters and hunted him up. He was sitting in his office, staring at the wall. When I came in he didn't even look at me.

I said: "So Hess got out."

"On bail," he answered.

"What about the singed hair?"

He clenched his fists. "The barber who made that statement told the commissioner that I got him rattled. He says, now, that he didn't singe Hess's hair. If you want the whole story, the men whom Tait saw will swear that Hess was in the barber shop, and I don't have any idea what's happened to Lida Dean."

"So your case has blown up higher than a kite."

"No. I'm not through."

"You will be by noon. The city council is meeting today. It's back to the sticks."

He stood up, shook his head. "Hess is still a murderer, and I'm still head of the homicide squad." Then he walked out.

I HUNG around, played a little rummy and smoked a lot of cigarettes, and wondered what in the world Hauser could do now. I couldn't think of a thing that would save him. Unless he had a lot of luck in a hurry, he would find himself demoted, and some one else would take over the case. Eventually, then, it would be buried with a lot of other unsolved crimes; but Ben Hauser would never have another

chance to get out of the ranks, and Frank Hess would be more secure than ever. At least, that's the way it looked to me, and I was feeling mighty glum about it when Ed Baker, who covers headquarters for a rival sheet, busted into the news room and grabbed a telephone. The story that he shot in made me dizzy. I relayed it to my own paper and then hunted up Ben Hauser.

"You're a fool for luck, Ben," I said. "Have you really got it?"

He nodded, pointed to a film box on his desk. "There it is, Spic. The Anderson Film Company, a firm that makes these advertising movies for various stores, happened to be making one for a moving company just a block from where Rocco was killed. They were taking a picture of one of the moving vans in the street, and the movie shows a car with Frank Hess in it. There's a clock in the picture, too, that sets the time. It smashes his alibi to hell."

I went over and thumped him on the back. "You've done it, boy. You've done it."

We chatted about it for a while, and then the extras hit the street. I went out and bought one, brought it in. He read the headlines and nodded, then laid the paper aside. It was getting close to noon.

"Hadn't you better run out an' get something to eat," he suggested.

I shook my head.

"Beat it, Spic," he said. "I've got work to do." He got up and started to elbow me toward the door, but we didn't ever reach it, for it opened, and Frank Hess came into the room. He was flanked on each side by a man who jerked out a gun as soon as they got in.

I raised my hands, saw that Hauser had raised his. Then I looked more closely at Frank Hess. There was a worried look in his eyes, and he seemed nervous.

He rasped out: "Where is it?"

Hauser said, thin-lipped, "Where is what?"

"The film, you fool," Hess snapped. "Where is it?"

Hauser made no answer, but I saw Hess's eyes go past him to his desk where the film lay, and I saw some of the tension go out of his body.

He said: "There it is on the desk, Mike. Get it."

One of the men slid around us, got the film. He brought it back, passed it to Frank Hess and Frank Hess grinned. He said to Hauser: "You sort of talked out of turn, didn't you."

Hauser shook his head. "You can't get by with this, Hess."

But Hess was getting by with it. He had the film. With two of his men, he had just walked in and taken it. The situation that Hauser faced flashed through my mind. How could he explain that the film had been stolen by Hess? Who would believe him? And what if they did believe him? The film would be gone. In another moment Hess would walk out with it, and that would be that.

I looked at Hauser. He was staring steadily at Hess. There was a sardonic expression in his eyes. He said, again: "You can't get by with this, Hess."

Hess laughed. He said, "So long, Ben," and took a step back toward the door.

Then the door opened again, and I saw Eddie Brumbaugh standing there in the hall. He didn't look well. There were circles under his eyes, and he hadn't shaved. One of the men whirled around to face him and snapped: "Come in an' shut the door."

BRUMBAUGH came into the room. I saw him glance at the box of films under Hess's arm and then look at the two men Hess had brought with him. He looked at me and at Ben Hauser. Then he said to Hess: "Where are you goin' with those

films?" There was a snap to his tone that warned me what to expect.

Hauser said: "Eddie, take it easy."

But Eddie Brumbaugh stepped forward to Frank Hess and, reaching out, jerked the films away from him. His fist snapped up and thudded against Hess's jaw. One of the men clubbed his gun and smashed Eddie in the side of the head. The other fired, and as Eddie Brumbaugh sagged from one blow, I saw his body jerk from the shot of the other man.

Then Hauser let out a yell and climbed the man who had shot Brumbaugh. He knocked the gun across the room, socked the man in the face, staggered him, followed up and hit him again. I didn't see the rest of it, for the other man took up my attention. But anyhow, it didn't last long. It wasn't a minute before the door busted open and a bunch of uniformed cops barged in. We didn't need cops, however, nearly as, much as a doctor.

When the confusion had died down, and they had hustled Frank Hess and his two men off to lock them up, Ben Hauser bent over Eddie Brumbaugh, who had been carried to a cot in the recreation room. The shot had clipped his shoulder. He wasn't hurt badly.

Eddie Brumbaugh said: "I got 'er, Ben."

"Got who?"

"The dame who—who got away. She'll talk, too. I—I'm sorry, Ben, that I went sour on you."

Ben Hauser grinned. "That's all right, Eddie."

He went back to his office, and I trailed along. He was frowning. I said: "What's the matter, Ben. You ought to feel mighty happy. Some day they'll make you chief."

He shook his head, picked up the box of film that some one had put back on his desk, jiggled it in his hand for a moment, and then said to me: "What'll I tell Eddie?"

"What'll you tell him about what?"

"About this film?"

I frowned, said: "He saved it for you, didn't he?"

Ben Hauser nodded. "Sure, but there wasn't any point in it. This film isn't any use in the case."

I stared at him. "Then where is the film?"

"There isn't one."

"Isn't one?"

He shook his head. "That film company did take a picture of the street at just about the time of the murder, but it didn't show anything. I just got to thinking about what a break it would be for me if it did; then I got an idea that if I couldn't get Hess on straight, legitimate evidence, I might be able to trap him on framed up evidence. So I borrowed a film and lugged it down here, wired my office with a dictaphone and put Tait on the other end. Then I waited for Hess to show up."

I whistled. "Boy, what a chance!"

"Not a chance at all. He was the murderer, wasn't he? We knew that. He had to come. That's all there was to it. Besides, if I didn't get him I was finished."

I said: "You were plenty lucky, Ben."

"No, I made my luck, Spic. But what'll I tell Eddie?"

I said: "Tell him he's a great guy. After all, he got the girl back, an' on top of that, jumped Hess."

He nodded and sat down at his desk. "Okay, Spic. An' now, beat it, will you? I've really got to get past some of this paper work."