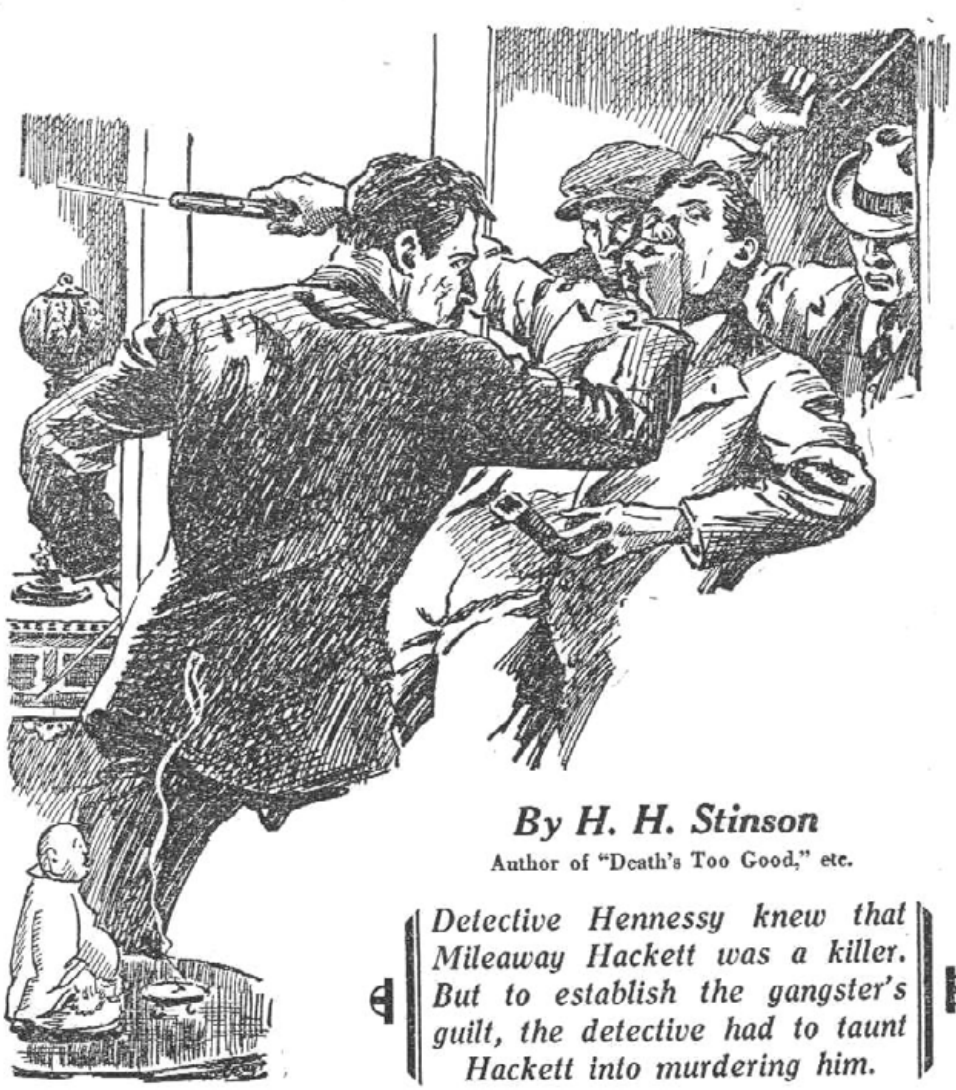
Ten Detective Aces, May, 1937

Killers Must Advertise



By H. H. Stinson
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Detective Hennessy knew that Mileaway Hackett was a killer. But to establish the gangster's guilt, the detective had to taunt Hackett into murdering him.

WHEN the coppers released Harry "Mileaway" Hackett after the killing of Gloria Forbes, it made the fifth straight time they had felt certain of his connection with a crime and been unable to do anything about it.

When a man injects foresight and clever planning into the matter of having an alibi, he expects to reap the benefits of hard work. And the nickname "Mileaway" had been earned by his ability to prove—well enough to satisfy legal requirements—that he had been at least a mile away from the scene of each of the five crimes at the moment each had happened.

So Gloria Forbes had been buried, and Mileaway had gone back to his private concerns, which the police suspected had something to do with dope-peddling. But they weren't able to prove that.

Mileaway was a smart guy, too smart for the coppers. And they didn't like that.

One of the coppers who particularly

didn't like it was ham-handed, red-headed Detective Lieutenant Hennessy, who at ten o'clock one evening stood in the darkness across from the York Hotel.

At quarter to eleven, Hennessy saw Mileaway step from the hotel and roll away in a taxi. Ten minutes later, Hennessy picked up a suitcase that had been out of sight in a darkened doorway and walked across to the York.

At the desk, a dark, sleek young man presented the register.

"Just a minute, friend," Hennessy said, lowering his voice so that the clerk had to lean over to hear him. "I'm superstitious about hotel rooms. Any room is good enough for me as long as it's number Four-twenty-one. Get it?"

The clerk said coldly: "Sorry. Room Four-twenty-one is occupied."

"You're wrong," Hennessy said, palming the gold and enamel of his badge. "Pete Vasconi did occupy it, but he left tonight on a two weeks' vacation. He left from the police court where the judge gave him two weeks for vag. So I'll move in and save him the rent."

He fixed the clerk with cold blue eyes.

"This is all under cover, see? So give me the room and then keep your trap shut or you'll be in trouble."

The clerk hesitated and then, overawed by the chilly fire in Hennessy's gaze, reached for the key to room 421. He gave it to a bellhop with orders to remove Vasconi's belongings, and Hennessy and the bellhop went to the elevator.

As soon as the elevator shot up, the clerk got on the phone. It took him thirty minutes to locate Mileaway, and when he did, he said into the phone, low-voiced: "Listen, Mr. Hackett. This is Sam at the hotel. Listen, there's a dick chiseled his way into the room next to yours. . . . No, sir, I don't know, but I thought I ought to warn you. He's up there now. . . . Don't let him know I told you, Mr. Hackett."

INSIDE of fifteen minutes, a taxi drove up the alley behind the York. Mileaway and two men got out of it. One of the men didn't look out of his early twenties but he had dead-gray eyes in a sulky, pasty-skinned face. The other was older with graying hair and a flat expressionless face.

They went into the hotel through the service entrance, walked up four flights of stairs without encountering anyone. In front of 419, Mileaway gestured for silence.

"Stick around out here," he whispered to the gray-haired man. "If you hear any uproar in my room, you and Eddie know what to do."

He put his key in the lock noisily, opened the door and pushed up the light switch. The lights revealed Hennessy on his knees beside the wall that separated 419 and 421. He looked startled. His red hair was rumpled, and there were beads of sweat on his forehead.

His huge hands held a small brace and bit, and there was crumbled plaster on the floor behind the dresser which had been pushed out from the wall. The plaster came from a circle of small holes that had been drilled in the wall.

Mileaway, dark and sleek and well-dressed, stood in the doorway, grinning.

"Don't mind me, Hennessy," he said.

Hennessy looked chagrined. He put the brace and bit down alongside a small leather box, a loop of wire, and a flashlight.

"Hello, Mileaway," he said.

"In the wrong room, aren't you, Hennessy?" Mileaway's tone was light, but there was no mirth in his eyes. His well-barbered head was thrust forward, and the tiny dark mustache on his upper lip heightened the tightness of his mouth.

"I still have an idea," Hennessy told

him, "that you were mixed up in that Gloria Forbes killing."

"You still think I bumped her, do you?"

"No, but you know who did and why."

Mileaway's eyes took in the litter on the floor. He touched the brace and bit with a patent-leather toe and stooped to pick up the leather box. A flat black apparatus slid out into his hand, and he nodded.

He said scornfully: "A dictograph, hunh?"

Hennessy shrugged. "They work sometimes."

"This one won't work any more," Mileaway said.

He dropped the dictograph ear on the floor. It rolled a few inches and came to rest. Hennessy bent for it, but Mileaway's heel came down on the apparatus first. He bore down, and it snapped.

His right hand balled into a fist. "I've got a notion to slap you around for that."

"Then get over the notion," Mileaway snapped. "If you got a warrant for me, serve it. If you haven't—get out! You got no legal right in my room and you know it."

Hennessy shrugged and began to collect the wire, the pieces of the dictograph ear, the brace and bit, the flashlight.

Watching him, Mileaway said: "Hennessy, I knew cops were dumb, but you're the dumbest of the lot. Did you think you could get anywhere crashing in here and planting a dick on me?"

"Well," Hennessy grunted, looking clumsy and drab in contrast to the other's dark elegance, "I know you hired some hooligan to bump the Forbes girl, and I thought you might make a pay-off here and spill his name—or something that would tip us off."

THE detective's hands were clutching the apparatus he had picked up from the floor. He was near the door.

Mileaway twirled a tip of his mustache.

"Listen, rat," said Hennessy, his eyes dark and humid, "in spite of the fact that you haven't got the nerve of a she-rabbit, I know you've been behind the murders of four men and the Forbes girl—"

"Why don't you do something about it then?"

"Oh, sure, sure. You were plenty far away any time there was any killing done. But you're not kidding me. You didn't bump the Forbes girl, because you don't have the guts. But you had her knocked off because she was going to finger you for the Federal narcotic dicks."

"Hooey!"

"What gets me about you rats," Hennessy ground out, "is you hire some punk to do your killing and then feel smart about it."

Their glances locked. Hennessy's was scornful and chilled. Mileaway's face flushed. His eyes narrowed and his lips puffed out with anger. He said: "So you think I'm yellow, do you? What do you use to think with?"

"I don't need brains to tell yellow when I see it. Yeah, it takes a lot of guts to hand dough to some hophead and tell him to blast somebody. A lot of guts. How smart do you have to be to sit a mile away when it happens? Sure, you've got plenty of guts—the kind I feed to cats."

Mileaway's eyes were deep wells of venom. A foul name spat through his lips, and the wire and the flashlight dropped out of Hennessy's hand. He swung and his knuckles slammed against Mileaway's mouth. The flow of curses stopped, and Mileaway sat down suddenly on the bed. Blood dribbled from his nose down into his waxed mustache.

Hennessy, bending down to pick up the flashlight, heard a scuffling noise at the door behind him. He started to turn, and something solid smacked his skull. His knees unjointed and he went to the floor with shivers of pain darting through his head.

He heard voices above him and when the pain dulled a little, he focused his eyes and saw Mileaway above him, pressing a crimsoned handkerchief to his mouth and nose. Hennessy turned over on his side and pushed himself to a sitting position. The gray-haired man was leaning against the dresser, a blackjack still hanging from his fingers. The youth with the dead eyes was leaning against the door.

"Well," Hennessy said. "Collino. And Eddie Maher, too. I might have known Mileaway wouldn't have the guts to tackle me alone."

MILEAWAY got up suddenly from the bed and started a kick for Hennessy's head. The detective ducked it and got an ankle in his hand and yanked. The blackjack smacked hard across the angle of his jaw. He let go of the ankle, and Mileaway flopped back on the bed.

Hennessy looked at Maher again and saw the youth was holding the police special that should have been in Hennessy's holster. Getting his knees under him, Hennessy made it to his feet slowly.

"Okay, you've had your fun," he growled. He started toward the door.

Maher raised the gun until it pointed at Hennessy's stomach. Mileaway said softly: "Stick around, Hennessy."

Hennessy halted, his big hands hanging loose. "You haven't got the nerve, Mileaway."

Collino leaned forward, his blackjack swinging a little. "Shall I button his mouth for him, Mileaway?"

"Wait a minute. I've got an idea." Mileaway got up from the bed. "First I want to find out if he's got anything else planted on me here."

He put in five minutes going over the room carefully. He pushed bed, dresser, radio, chairs, away from the walls. He looked all around the molding, looked into the closet, the bathroom. He pulled the curtains at the windows aside and finally opened windows and peered outside. He found nothing.

Eddie Maher brightened up for a moment and suggested: "You better look at his room, too, Mileaway."

He opened the door, and Mileaway nodded and went out into the hall. After a little, he came back and shut the door.

"Nobody and nothing in his room," he said. "The whole floor's quiet, too."

He crossed the room and sat on the bed.

"You been pushing me around a lot the last couple of years, Hennessy," he observed.

"Not as much as I'd like to."

"To-night you've made a lot of cracks about me not having any guts."

"That still holds good, rat," Hennessy said.

Mileaway ground out the cigarette in an ashtray. "You shot off your face that I didn't have the nerve to bump anybody, didn't you?"

Hennessy moved a little and Collino and Eddie Maher moved with him. He halted.

"I'm going to prove you're wrong about that," Mileaway said. "I'm going to knock you off myself, personally. Does that win the argument or not?"

COLLINO jerked a startled glance at Mileaway. He then said doubtfully: "Hey, now, Mileaway—"

"Shut up," Mileaway Hackett said.

"But not here," Collino protested. "Don't be a damn fool."

"This guy's been in my hair for two years. I should pass up a chance like this."

"But if he's found in your room—"

"He won't be."

Hennessy sneered: "Trust Mileaway for an alibi."

"These coppers," Eddie Maher put in, "get blood all around, Mileaway."

"Wait. I shoot him here. He gets blood on this rug. Then we move him and the rug to his room and bring his rug here."

Collino objected again. "You're crazy, Mileaway. If they don't find the bullet in there—"

"It would have gone out of the window from the spot where we plant Hennessy."

"I'm just an amateur," Hennessy said, shrugging. "But why don't you shoot me in there, Mileaway? Not so complicated."

"Don't butt in, copper."

"This whole thing's screwy," Collino said. "If you want this copper bumped, we'll take him out the River Road and leave him in a ditch."

Mileaway was beginning to look angry. He snarled: "Will you guys shut up? This dumb ape has been making cracks about me, not about you, and I want him for myself. Now listen—I'll bump him right in this room because I've got a radio, and we can turn it up loud so it hides the shot. Then we'll shift him and the rug—five minutes to do it all."

Hennessy's face was grim. "You can't get by with it. Inspector Davidson knows I'm here and that I'm after you."

"I don't care if the Mayor knows you're here. Nobody knows I'm here. And when they find you, dummy, you'll be a suicide with powder marks around the bullet hole and the bullet, provided it stays in your skull, from your own rod and only your finger prints on the gun."

"They'll know I never committed suicide."

"Maybe they'll know it but they can't prove it."

Collino objected: "He may have a couple of flatfeet watching the hotel."

Mileaway shrugged. "What do I care? We can fix it so the bell captain hears a shot in Hennessy's room fifteen minutes after we've reached the Blue Evening Cafe. The whole thing's a natural."

HENNESSY'S big shoulders shifted a little. Eddie Maher lifted the gun quickly, and Collino tensed. Hennessy did nothing for the moment but growl: "What do you think I'll be doing all the time, you cheap heel?"

Mileaway's eyes shifted a little, went past Hennessy. The detective started to swing around, and a circlet of steel snapped on his left wrist. He heaved forward. Collino's blackjack thumped heavily against Hennessy's right shoulder, and the arm went dead for a moment. Collino grabbed the detective's right wrist, jerked and there was another snap. When tingles of life returned to Hennessy's right arm, his hands were cuffed behind his back with his own handcuffs.

"What was it you were going to be doing?" Mileaway grinned.

Hennessy heaved backward into Collino and went off his feet. They hit the dresser and slid to the floor. Collino wriggled out from beneath Hennessy, got to his feet and kicked the detective in the side.

"Lay off," Mileaway said sharply. "I don't want him marked up too much."

"By damn, he can't do that to me," Collino snarled.

"Pretty soon he can't do it to anybody. Eddie, hand me the copper's gun. Collino, you turn on the radio. Make it plenty loud."

Maher handed Hennessy's gun to

Mileaway and got a flat black automatic out of his own shoulder holster. Collino stooped at the radio cabinet. Hennessy gave one long gusty breath. His face was red from the struggle, and he puffed his lips out stubbornly.

Collino was thumbing a dial, and Mileaway said: "Hurry it up, will you?"

Hennessy, lying on his back, looked at Mileaway. He said: "I still can't believe you've got the guts to bump anybody."

"You'll believe it in a minute when it's too late," Mileaway snarled. "Now I'll tell you something else, Hennessy. It was me killed the Forbes girl. Me myself, personally. I'd kicked her out, and she threatened to turn me in to the Feds."

"Bunk," Hennessy grunted. "I know, myself, you were in a movie theatre when she got killed. What're you trying to sell me?"

Mileaway grinned. "I'm just showing you you're wrong about me, copper. I left the theatre through a fire door, did the job, came back the same way. Get it?"

Collino got up from the radio. He said: "Maybe you know how to get this radio going, Mileaway. I don't."

Mileaway moved toward the big walnut cabinet. Hennessy swiveled suddenly on the small of his back. His big feet came in toward his body, recoiled like the rear battery of a mule, hit the lower panel of the radio with a crash that sent walnut splintering inward, toppled the instrument with a crash that told of broken mechanism.

He said savagely: "I won't go out to music, anyway."

He saw a boot starting and he rolled from it, but it caught him under the ear. Feet and fists hammered his face, his belly, his ribs. He felt a rib crack, and blood began to flow from a gash behind his ear. They jerked him up and flung him on the bed, and Mileaway took a last smash at his mouth and stood panting.

"Take him out on the River Road," he snapped. "With the radio busted we can't do it here."

"That's better," Collino said.

"Damn it," Mileaway grated, "I wanted to do it myself but I better not now. I'll phone for Maxie's cab to meet you in the alley, and you can take him down the service stairs. Haul him plenty of miles away and burn him down in front of some all-night dump so there'll be witnesses when it was done. I'll beat it to the Blue Evening, stay there until one o'clock."

"Come on," Maher rasped at Hennessy and pulled him to his feet.

THEY walked him to the door between them. His knees were wobbly, and he hung his weight on their arms as much as he could.

"Wait while I see if the hall's clear."

Collino unlocked the door, pulled it a little way open, stuck his head out. Hennessy saw his shoulders jerk, trying to pull the head back fast. His head did come back, but with a big fist pasted to the jaw. He went down, and the door banged open against Maher.

Eddie let Hennessy go, and the detective went to his hands and knees and rolled over against Maher's legs. Above him, he saw Inspector Davidson's bulky figure in rough tweeds. Collino was bouncing around on the floor and coming up with a gun. Another gun boomed above Hennessy's head, and he saw Eddie Maher's hand, squeezing a trigger.

Guns banged again and Davidson swore. Maher turned around slowly and then fell across Hennessy. Collino was squirming and yelling on the floor near the bed; he had dropped his gun and was holding his stomach just below his vest.

Mileaway was saying and doing

nothing. He stood by the dresser with his hands in the air. Blue-clad legs milled around Hennessy's horizontal figure, and outside the door, he saw the slender bundle of a press photographer's tripod.

Hennessy was lifted to his feet, his wrists released from the cuffs. He rubbed his wrists and winced at the pain in his side. He looked at Mileaway out of swollen eyes and managed a grin.

"I guess," he said, "this is once, you rat, you're not a mile away."

Mileaway's hands were down in front of him now with shiny steel cuffs on the wrists. He was pallid but defiant. He said: "You guys got nothing on me."

"That's what you think," Hennessy said. "Everything work out, Inspector?"

"Not a hitch. Except I had a tough time keeping the boys away from here while these hooligans were mussing you up."

"You heard it all?"

"Everything, including his confession that he faked the theatre alibi and killed the Forbes girl. He's set to fry."

Mileaway's face had taken on a greenish tinge. He wet his lips again and croaked: "This—this is a dirty frame-up. I looked this place over from floor to ceiling and I know it wasn't wired."

"Sure it wasn't wired," Hennessy grinned. "You see, Mileaway, I wasn't sent up here to plant a dictograph. I was sent here to make you think I was planting one and then have a nice little talk with you for the benefit of the district attorney, high powers from the Good Government League, a couple of presidents of women's clubs and reporters from all the papers. Look."

Hennessy stood the radio upright and unhooked the grilled front. Suspended in the cone of the loudspeaker was a microphone. Wires led from it to a steel-paneled box in the bottom of the cabinet. The box was a dozen inches high and four inches thick and graduated dials crowded the front of it.

"That," said Hennessy, "is what I was sent to plant, Mileaway. And it's what I did plant. It's one of the new five-meter transmitters the department is putting on radio patrol cars so they can have two-way communication with headquarters. When you took a bow a few minutes ago for killing Gloria Forbes, the set picked it up and put it on the air. A receiving set in an office across the street caught it and delivered the whole thing on a platter to all those reliable witnesses I was telling you about. Now, let's see you alibi out of that."

Mileaway cursed in a bitter, gasping voice and one of the uniformed men clapped a hand over the snarling lips.

DAVIDSON grinned and said: "There's a lot of influential people outside would like to shake hands with a swell copper, Hennessy."

Hennessy looked uneasy, "Aw, skipper," he said, "you know I'm no good at that sort of stuff."

"Go on, Hennessy—it won't hurt you."

Hennessy ran combing fingers through his shaggy thatch. He said: "Well, I'm a hell of a sight to meet people, but I guess us radio stars got obligations to our public."