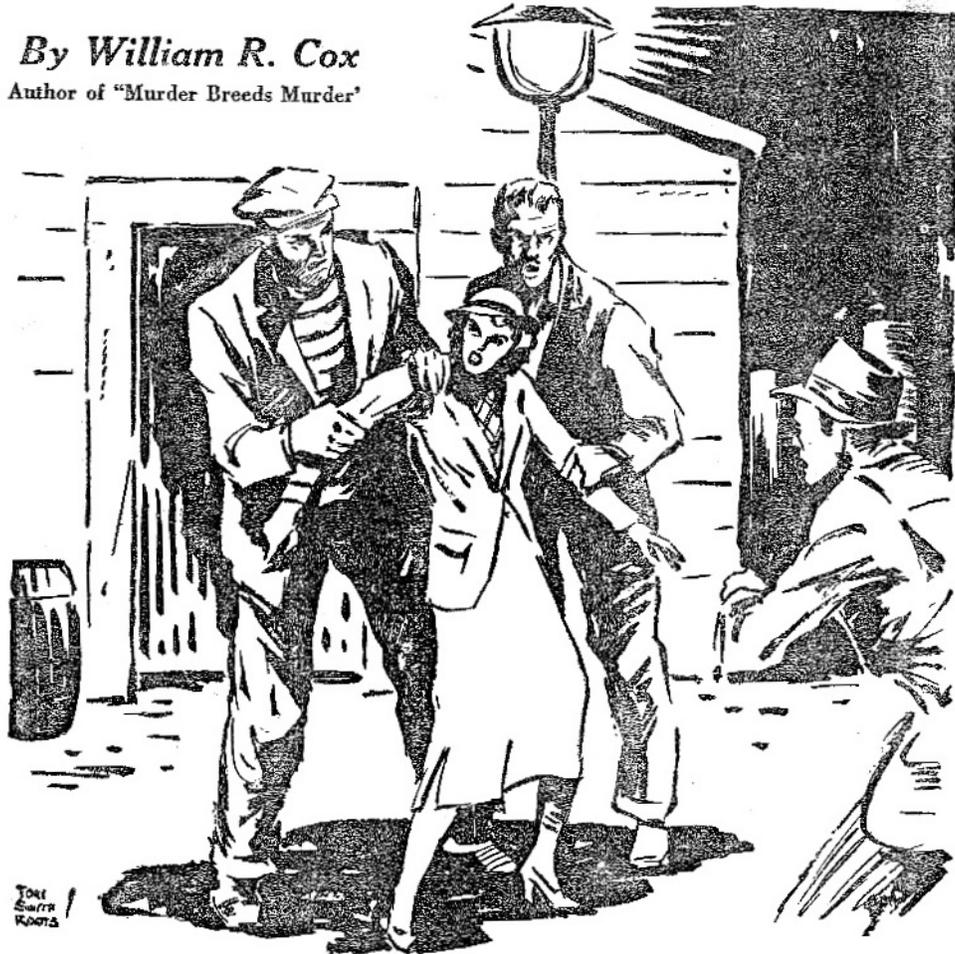


The girl had the private dick's heart doing double-time. And then he found that her secret of swinging brass knucks and flying sap made her a double dose of . . .

Blonde Dynamite

By William R. Cox
Author of "Murder Breeds Murder"



THE body was that of a well-dressed, short man who appeared to have been in his late thirties. "Bump" Gridley lifted the upflung arm and looked curiously at the gaping flesh from chin to temple. The right eye was almost torn from the socket. There was a bullet hole flecked with powder marks in the exact center of the forehead. The man was still warm, but quite dead.

Bump Gridley took off his brown hat and scratched his unruly hair. He was a

rangy young man with a square jaw and well-spaced brown eyes. Brown was, indeed, his dominating motif; brown skin, brown clothing, brown shoes, shirt and tie. His suit was tweed and slightly rumpled. He looked puzzled and a little worried. He picked a revolver off the floor and gingerly wrapped it in a handkerchief.

He prowled around the room for a moment. Then he shook his head, snapped off the single light and let himself quietly out the door.

There were three other doors leading off the short hall. The Club Harmony was a roadhouse with only the two stories. On this, the second floor, there were evidently four rooms. Two of them were small, private dining rooms such as the one Gridley had just left. The others were marked, respectively: *Ladies* and *Gentlemen*. As Gridley slipped down the hall he thought he heard a door open and close. He froze for a moment, but no one appeared.

He moved with amazing speed for a man his size, gliding down the corridor toward the stairs. The sportive noises of the gay crowd came clearly up to him.

There was only one exit, he knew. It was through the dining and dance hall below. He paused uncertainly at the top of the stairs waiting for a particularly noisy interlude which would give him cover to escape unnoticed. It was dim on the landing, and he shrank back against the wall. Before he could make a break some one started up the stairs.

A dry voice below said: "I've been up there. I'll wait at that table for you."

"Okay, commissioner, I'll be right down," came the hearty answer.

Gridley froze. Those were the accents of Captain Bone of Newkirk Homicide Department. The captain was one man he did not care to face. He heard a door open behind him and whirled hastily.

A girl had just come out of the room marked *Ladies*. She was staring at him.

He moved quickly to her side and said: "About time you came out. I been waitin' an hour. Come on down and have one more jig and then we'll go. It won't be so late. Your mom won't kick if we're home before midnight."

HEAVY FOOTFALLS came up the steps, and the opposite portal swung open and shut. No time to lose.

Gridley took the girl by the arm and said persuasively: "Come on, toots. I need an out, see? Walk downstairs with me and across the dining room and to the door. I'll duck there, and you can go back to the guy that brought you."

"Please," she stammered, "I— That's is, he's gone. I can't find him—I mean, the man who brought me."

"He must be nuts," said Gridley, looking down at her admiringly.

He was leading her down the steps, into the slanting, indirect lighting of the hall. He bent closer, averting his face from possible onlookers. The girl was slight and blonde, and her limbs were rounded and shapely. Her blue eyes were innocent and wide. Her lips were full and lightly rouged. Her movements were light and graceful. She wore a blue dress that matched her eyes.

Gridley reassured her: "It's all right. I'm a cop, see? I'm on a case, and I don't want to be recognized out here. We'll go out to my car, and I'll gladly drop you any place you wanta go."

"Oh—that would be wonderful," she breathed. "I'm—I'm really frightened."

She was playing up to him now, looking up into his face, half turning so that their heads were together. Neither would be readily recognized by anyone not actually looking for them. They mingled with an incoming party and slipped swiftly out of doors. It was a dark night in early spring, and their movements were unseen.

Bump had his car parked at the edge of the parking lot, ready for a quick getaway. He opened the door and assisted the girl. He paused a second and leaned to see if her skirt was clear of the sill.

Something landed alongside his head with terrific force. He spun around and slipped to his haunches, his brain spinning in space, planets scoting before his eyes.

He wasn't completely out, but he was

powerless to move. He heard hands fumbling for his keys, a self-starter grind. A car caught and drove away. He got to his knees and reached for his running board. He was thinking of the blonde, terrified, helpless girl. He fell forward on his face. His car was gone.

He rolled over and sat up. He didn't try to rise until his head had cleared. He reached out and picked up his brown hat. It was badly dented. It had obviously saved him from a worse blow on the skull. He straightened it mechanically into his own individual angles and tried to think.

After awhile he got to his feet and brushed at his clothes. He staggered a bit as he went back into the Club Harmony and entered the dining hall. At a small table sat two men. One was a thick-necked individual with a red face who had "policeman" written all over him. The other was a dignified gentleman in evening clothes who seemed as much out of place in the roadhouse as his companion.

Gridley went over and paused beside the table. Captain Julius Bone looked up at him and scowled. He said: "Hello, shamus. This is Commissioner England. He's the man who's gonna grab your license one of these days."

Gridley shook hands with the commissioner. He knew Alexander England as a strict disciplinarian, a rule-of-thumb police official. He grimaced and said:

"That makes it all the tougher."

"You in trouble again?" said Bone truculently. "I warned you, Bump. You gotta stop killin' people."

The commissioner looked severe.

Bump groaned: "I would have to run into you two guys with a corpse on my hands that I can't explain."

COMMISSIONER ENGLAND'S
aesthetic countenance lengthened, his

wide, thin mouth drooped at the corners. He said coldly:

"We are not interested in untimely jests, Mr. Gridley. The captain—"

Captain Bone interrupted: "Wait a minute, Mr. England. Did you say a corpse, Bump?"

A waiter came up. Gridley said: "Bring these gentlemen whatever they're drinking, and bring me a double Scotch and soda. I'll need it."

"Where is this corpse, Gridley?" asked Bone.

Bump said plaintively: "You know, captain, it ain't fair. Trouble follows me around like it owns me. I'm gonna close that agency and go into somethin' easy, like peddlin' dope, or runnin' an alky still."

Bone's face got redder than ever. He said: "Out with the story, Gridley."

"Please," interposed Commissioner England coldly, "can't we postpone this? After all, we are here on business, captain."

"We could postpone it, all right, sir," said Bump gently. "But if somethin' ain't done sooner or later, that guy upstairs is goin' to begin to stink."

"Upstairs?" barked Bone. "In this building?"

"In Room Four," murmured Bump. "A guy that wanted protection. From me, too. I got here too late."

The police captain was halfway up the stairs. Bump and the commissioner followed at a more leisurely pace. The captain rushed down the hall and threw open the door of Room 4. Bump stepped aside and bowed the commissioner ahead.

The corpse lay undisturbed in the middle of the room. Captain Bone was bent over, peering at the death wounds. He said:

"Knucked first and shot afterwards. Plenty of blood from the knuck marks.

Couldn't have been dead to bleed that much when he was hit. Shot close up. Where's the gun?"

Bump Gridley said coolly: "Ain't it around? I got out pretty quick."

Captain Bone got to his feet. He walked over and seized Gridley by the lapel of his coat, jamming him against the wall. He said:

"Damn you, Gridley, I warned you plenty. This isn't the first time you've held out on us. Now open up, and open up quick, or I'll have you in the tank in a jiffy. There's boys down at headquarters'd love to go to work on you."

Bump said quietly: "Commissioner England, do you stand for these strongarm methods? I heard you were plenty tough on cops who banged guys around."

England coughed and said: "Really, captain. I mean to say—nothing definite on the man. Hold him, by all means. But still—no proof, is there?"

The officer released his hold unwillingly. He stepped back and growled: "You better talk, shamus."

"The man called me up," said Gridley. "Said his name was Crowell and he wanted protection. He was afraid of an attempt on his life. He sounded all right—like a gentleman. I came out here and found him like this. Some one beat me to it."

"Crowell? Carter Crowell? Why, that man is attached to the governor's staff. I had a notation to assist him in any way I could," said Bone.

He bent and rifled the man's pockets. He drew out a wallet containing bills and a card case. He said:

"No robbery. Yep—it's Crowell. This is gonna raise a storm that you can't beat, Gridley. You're under arrest."

England said: "Why, I was to meet Crowell tomorrow. He was conducting a private investigation of some sort for the governor. This is terrible."

Bone said, threateningly: "I suppose this man, an agent of the state, a man who could appeal to us for aid under any circumstances, called on you, a private detective, to protect him. That's pretty thin, Gridley."

BUMP removed his hat and scratched at the lump on the side of his head. He said: "Wait a minute, cap. There's something. There was a woman. She was in the hall. She said her escort had deserted her. She went outside with me. And believe it or not, she conked me with a sap and swiped my car."

The commissioner said, icily: "I suppose that Mr. Crowell was frightened of a young girl."

"If he would have known how she can swing a sap he would have been scared all right," said Bump thoughtfully.

Bone said: "Hooey. You stay right here. Ring that bell. Get the manager up here. Get all the help, one at a time."

The manager proved to be an excitable Italian. At sight of the corpse he shrieked his dismay, wrung his hands. Instructions became confused and a body of waiters poured into the room. Bone, in the middle, shouted questions and instructions.

Gridley gathered that Crowell had come in alone, that he had insisted on Room 4 and that no one had seen an unescorted lady. The hat-check girl came in and fainted at sight of the blood.

Bump eased out the door without being noticed by anyone. There was a spring lock. He managed to slip it and closed the door carefully. He could hear Bone's voice thundering as he faded down the hall.

He saw his drink on the table. He went over and drank it down in one gulp. It tasted good. He wondered who would pay for it. He went outside and waited patiently in the shadows of the portals of the club.

A siren sounded, and a prowler car

wheeled up. As it slowed down a cop dropped off and ran into the roadhouse, His comrade followed more leisurely. Bump waited until they were through the door, then stepped into the car and started the motor. He stuck it into second and tramped on the gas. Gravel spurted under the wheels as he skidded out of the driveway and onto the highway.

He snapped on the radio and wondered how soon the report would go out. He knew Bone would telephone and that the radio message would not be long forthcoming. Eighty seconds later a droning voice said:

“All police cars stand by. State troopers stand by. General alarm. Car Thirty-six, Rockview Police, stolen by armed man. Proceeding on Route Ten toward Newkirk. All police stand by to intercept.”

Bump shook his head in admiration. The combination of radio and telephone were certainly making it tough for it crooks. He remembered reading that sixty seconds was the average time of transmission in Detroit. He wheeled onto a little-used short-cut and thanked his stars that he was on home grounds. He slid onto Route 6 and burned the road toward Newkirk, leaving them to comb Route 10.

He sailed down Bloomington Avenue to a spot near a cab station. He picked out a house which was darkened and slid the prowler car into the driveway. He left it there and walked down to the cab station.

There was a hack available. He told the driver to go to the North Side section of Newkirk. He settled back and assembled the slim facts which he had gathered. Midway en route he rapped on the glass and told the cabby to take him to the nearest telegraph station. It was considerably out of the way, but he had decided that it was worth-while.

He sent his wire and headed back

north. At the corner of Delecroix and Lake Streets he paid off the cab and watched it out of sight. Then he went down Delecroix to a house which sat far back from the street and was surrounded by trees and luxuriant foliage. It was a big house with a driveway which started up center and wound around each side.

HE WALKED noiselessly on the grass to the back, where there was a four-car garage. Using his flash cautiously, he investigated. One compartment was empty, the other held a station wagon. In the third was a sedan. In the fourth was his own convertible coupe. Bump grunted in satisfaction and clicked off his light.

He stole around the building. There was a long porch, glassed in, along one side. The house was entirely darkened. Walking carefully on the grass, Bump approached the steps of the glass porch and mounted to the door. He took a glass cutter from his pocket and made a small circle. Wrapping his knuckles in his handkerchief, he rapped smartly. The glass fell inside and tinkled faintly.

He swore silently in the darkness. He had counted on a rug being beneath the window of the door. He waited for a couple of moments without stirring. There was no sound from within.

He thrust his hand through the aperture and found the latch. A moment later he was on the porch. There was a lot of furniture in the dimness, but he managed to avoid it. He found a French window and went to work with a tiny jimmy. It gave easily. He loosened his gun in its holster and eased his big frame into the room.

He took one step. Something crashed against his skull for the second time that night. Once more heavenly bodies floated in pitch darkness. He went down into a deep well of unconsciousness. . . .

When he awoke his head was splitting.

He was jammed into some kind of a rumbling compartment. His hands and feet were tied. It was some moments before he realized that he was in a moving automobile. He could not move about. It was utterly black, so he figured that the night had not passed while he was unconscious.

The car rumbled on boards, then stopped. Bump could hear water lapping and knew at once that they were on some sort of wharf. The danger of his predicament bore in upon him. A chain clanked, and he knew that it was fastened to his ankles and wrists. He was to be dumped in the bay, never to be found. The chain would anchor him to the bottom.

A door opened, and powerful hands grabbed him and dragged him out of the car. He saw now that it was the station wagon which he had seen in the garage on Delecroix Street. The man who was mauling him was huge and powerful.

Bump said: "Take it easy, bud. If I gotta drown, okay—but you don't have to break my legs. How's about talkin' this thing over?"

The big man merely grunted. He was doing something to the chain about Gridley's feet. Bump twisted his hands as far as rope and chain would allow. There was a little give, but the rope was stout. Something jarred on the planks of the deserted old wharf. Bump's heart sank as he realized that a weight was being attached to his leg chains.

He managed to maneuver his arms up his chest. There was a loose length of chain. It was a heavy chain. Bump inhaled deeply but did not waste his strength in yelling. The place was well chosen— isolated, disused. Calls for help would be futile.

The big man turned. Bump could not see his face in the dark. He felt himself seized about the middle and raised upside

down. The big man was powerful enough to swing Bump's body over his head as if to hurl him far out into the black waters.

Bump took all the slack in the piece of chain about his wrists. His face was toward the big man's body. He let the chain swing out and then convulsed his head and shoulders, swinging the end of the chain as hard as he could.

THE HEAVY LINKS caught the giant in the groin. He staggered. Bump timed the swing of the chain, drove again. The man went down, groaning. Bump managed to land upon his shoulder and roll several times after he had struck.

The chains hampered him. He lay there and listened to the curses of his fallen assailant. He wondered how long the effects of his blows would linger.

He worked frantically at his bonds. They were secure and he could make no headway. The big man began dragging himself across the wharf, growling maledictions in a guttural voice. Bump's wrists were bleeding with his exertions, but the rope was holding.

It was too dark to see the big man, but Bump knew that he must be close. He took up all the slack his strength could manage and tried to get set for another swing of the chain. He knew, with sinking heart, that this time his chances were less than a million to one.

Then there was sudden sound in the night, and headlights swept across the scene. Bump heaved once more at the chain and yelled,

"Help! This way!"

The car ran swiftly out on the boards. A figure dismounted swiftly. In the reflected glare of the headlights Bump saw trim ankles and silken legs. He gave a gasp of astonishment and dismay.

The giant was on his knees now. He staggered up and went toward the

newcomer, long arms swinging apelike. Bump yelled:

“Scram! Get away! He’ll kill you.”

The headlights illuminated the scene clearly. The girl moved forward calmly. The big man made a lunge, arms outstretched. The girl moved straight forward, inside the attack and swung her right hand hard.

Bump moaned: “You can’t hurt that guy. Scram!”

Then the giant was staggering back, shrieking in agony. The girl followed closely, swinging her left hand. Something flashed. The big man went down, shaking the wooden planks with his weight. He lay still.

Bump blinked in amazement; then he said: “Toots, you certainly can swing those things. How’s about untyin’ an old pal?”

She came over and fumbled with his bonds. She produced a tiny knife and sawed at the ropes.

Bump said: “Take it easy. When you get done we’ll go back and wash this thing up together.”

“You think so?” she asked.

“Sure,” said Bump. “I know stuff now. I recognized that gorilla just as you put him away.”

“Oh,” she gasped, “am I hurting you?”

“Not nearly so much as you did at the Club Harmony,” said he cheerfully.

“That was before I knew what was going on,” she explained.

“Before or after, you certainly can swing a blackjack,” said Bump. “There—I can manage the rest of it now.”

He freed himself, took the girl by the hands and said: “Look—let’s make it snappy, huh?”

He went over and rolled the big man under the station wagon, tying him securely to the rear wheel. He pushed the wagon close to the edge of the water and said:

“I hope he rolls over and falls in. Well, I see you’re still using my crate. Let’s go.”

SHE was silent on the ride back into town. From time to time he glanced at her placid profile. She looked unbelievably young and innocent. Her blue eyes were wide open, her full lips pouted like a schoolgirl’s. He shook his head in wonderment, remembering the swift action on the old wharf.

He pulled into Delecroix Street and parked in front of the house with the circular driveway. He got out and said:

“Come on, baby. We finish here.”

Her voice from inside the car was hesitant. She said: “Are you sure you know it all?”

“I’m a detective, ain’t I? C’mon.”

She climbed out of the car. He let her go a step ahead, then closed in and put one arm about her from behind. She struggled briefly, but he got her bag out of her hand. Still holding her, he opened it and removed a pair of brass knuckles and a small, limber blackjack. He said:

“Just to make the works complete. And because my head aches enough now.”

“You didn’t have to take them that way,” she said, not stirring.

His arms remained about her. Then he pushed her ahead of him, and they went up the front steps of the house. Bump rang the bell. Steps sounded inside, a face peered out at them. The door was flung open, and Captain Julius Bone’s voice boomed:

“So you’re back. What now, you crook?”

“Quiet, captain,” said Bump. “Can’t you see there’s a lady present. C’mon, we want in.”

He pushed the girl ahead of him, and they went in. There was a light in a room off the foyer. Bump turned toward it.

Captain Bone lumbered behind, saying: “Your license is already gone. Jail it’ll be

now, shamus.”

The room was furnished, as a den. Commissioner Alexander England’s severe face peered at them from behind a large desk.

Bump motioned the blonde girl to a chair and said: “I found Miss— Say what’s your name, toots?”

The girl said steadily: “Dorothy Jarvis.”

“Dorothy Jarvis, eh?” said Bump slowly. “Well, that about clears things up. You’re the girl operator who works for Universal. It’s all pretty clear now.”

Bone said: “Clear as mud. Talk fast, Gridley. You’re in bad, you know.”

“Sure,” said Bump. He sank into an easy chair from which he could plainly see all three occupants of the room. “Let’s have a little resume of this thing. Carter Crowell calls me tonight because he is scared, governor’s man or no governor’s man. I go out to the Club Harmony and find him croaked. I pick this gal up on the floor where the job is done, and she takes a swipe at me with a sap and steals my heap. I don’t wanta be pinched then, so I take a run-out powder on you and the commissioner. You know all that, eh?”

Bone snapped: “Don’t horse around with us, Gridley.”

Bump looked at the man behind the desk, and the commissioner said, dryly, “Go on with the story, Gridley. Something tells me that you are in serious difficulties.”

“So I come down here tracing my car,” said Bump.

“What made you think your car was here?” demanded Bone.

“Well, I had a hunch the girl was working for the commissioner,” said Gridley calmly.

“You what—are you nuts?” said Bone.

The commissioner was staring at the girl. He said: “She was conducting a

private investigation for me. That is true.”

Bone’s face was amazed.

Bump went on: “Sure. When I mentioned a woman back there in the Club Harmony, do you remember what the commissioner said, captain? He said something about ‘Why should Crowell fear a young girl!’ How did he know it was a young girl? A small thing, but you know how us detectives pick things up.”

Bone said: “I don’t get this. It’s screwy.”

“You ain’t heard nothing,” said Bump cheerily. “I come down here and do an illegal entry. I was curious about Miss Jarvis, you see. When I got in, some one was layin’ for me. He gave me the works and dragged me down to the bay. He had ideas about slipping me into the drink. Miss Jarvis came along and interrupted him. And who do you think it was, Captain Bone?”

BONE’S habitually red face was now devoid of color. He said huskily: “Who, Gridley? How should I know?”

“It was that old playmate of yours, ‘Ape’ Perroni. You know, Newkirk’s number-one muscle man? Now how do you suppose he got in here?”

The commissioner said: “He must have been lying in wait for me. I’ve been after that criminal ever since I got into office.”

“You have,” said Bump. He turned to the blonde girl and said, “You wanta talk, baby?”

Her voice was low and pleasant. She said in even accents: “Mr. England hired me to follow a certain person. I took a cab and followed him out to the Club Harmony. The man took Room Four. I went upstairs and into the ladies’ room to consider my next step. Some one went through the hall while I was inside. I waited until he came out and went downstairs. Then I went down to Room

Four and tried the door. It was open. Mr. Crowell was on the floor, dead. I went back to the rest room.”

Bump said suddenly: “Put your hands on the desk, commissioner. In plain sight. That’s right. And keep them there.”

His gun was steady in his hand. He lounged back in the chair and went on: “Take it easy, captain. This is hot.”

“You’ll go to jail for life for this, Gridley,” gasped Bone. “This is crazy!”

“Fine language for a police captain,” grinned Bump. “The commissioner doesn’t think it’s crazy. Look at him.”

The long face of the official was white. Beads of moisture were on his lip. His mouth hung open a trifle, and he seemed to have difficulty in breathing.

Bump said: “You know why Crowell didn’t call upon the police for help? He was perfectly aware that there wouldn’t be any forthcoming. He was conducting an investigation all right, captain. It was Commissioner Alexander England, the great reformer, whom he was investigating. Something about vice, the alky racket and snow peddling, wasn’t it, commissioner? And your friendship with Mr. Perroni?”

“You don’t believe this, Bone,” said England through dry lips.

“He hired Miss Jarvis to tail Crowell. He followed to the Club Harmony. He went upstairs, while Miss Jarvis was in the rest room, and attacked Crowell with a pair of brass knuckles he had gotten from Perroni. Then he shot Crowell with Crowell’s own gun. Do you remember when you went upstairs, captain, and he said he had already been up there and that he would wait at the table for you? He’d been there, all right. He’d done a murder.”

“Proof!” croaked England. “You have no proof!”

“You didn’t think you could stop a state investigation by killing one man, did

you?” said Bump contemptuously. “They’ll get plenty on your connection with the mobs. We don’t need to pin this on you.”

The girl spoke again. “I found the knuckles in the hall. I—I guess there wouldn’t be prints on them now. I—I had to use them.”

“On Perroni,” explained Bump, “To keep me from being chucked into the water. You should see her swing ‘em, captain—like a champ.”

He dropped the glittering knuckles on the desk. He fished Crowell’s gun out of his pocket and deposited it beside the knuckles. He said:

“You see, captain, despite your distrust of me, the governor has a good opinion of the Gridley agency. That’s why Crowell came to me. The governor has known me since I was a kid. There’s a lot of things I know about England, for instance—”

Bone yelled: “Stop him!”

IT was too late. The man behind the desk had Crowell’s gun in his hand. Before Bump could pull the trigger there was an explosion. Commissioner England and the smoking gun fell forward on the desk.

The girl said: “Oh!”

“Don’t look at him,” said Bump. “Go out in the hall.”

She covered her face and slipped out. Bump said, “She’s a good kid all right. Didn’t faint or anything.”

Captain Bone said: “But you didn’t have real proof that he killed Crowell. This is going to be a mess, Gridley.”

Bump said, patiently. “Circumstantial evidence would have convicted him. But look, cap. He undoubtedly had wiped the prints off that gun. So he picks it up and shoots himself with it and puts them back on again. The knucks you can trace to Perroni and back to England. Perroni is

tied up on the wharf. To escape a bad beef, he'll squawk. There's the stuff—and the case. It's yours. There's a state department man on the way up. I wired him."

"But I don't figure in this—it's your case," protested the rigidly honest Bone.

"For what? There's no dough in this. I'm a business man, not a copper; Besides, I signed your name to the wire. Take over, Captain Bone."

He was out the door. The girl was not in the hall. He raced down the front steps and leaped into the car. She said:

"I don't like all this killing. I don't like this business. I thought I'd like it, but I don't."

Bump carefully ran his hands over her. She squeaked a protest and squirmed away from him. He explained:

"I ain't makin' a pass at you, baby. Not yet. I wouldn't think of it until I frisked you for a blackjack."

"Oh," she said. "I—you took it away from me."

"I am a smart guy, at that," said Bump Gridley.

There was a long silence in the coupe. Then he said: "So you don't like the business? Okay—quit it. I never thought the day would come, but I'll do it. I'll marry you."

"That," she said, "is big of you. But—well, okay."

"And I'll bet," grumbled Bump, "that rollin' pins hurt just as much as blackjacks."