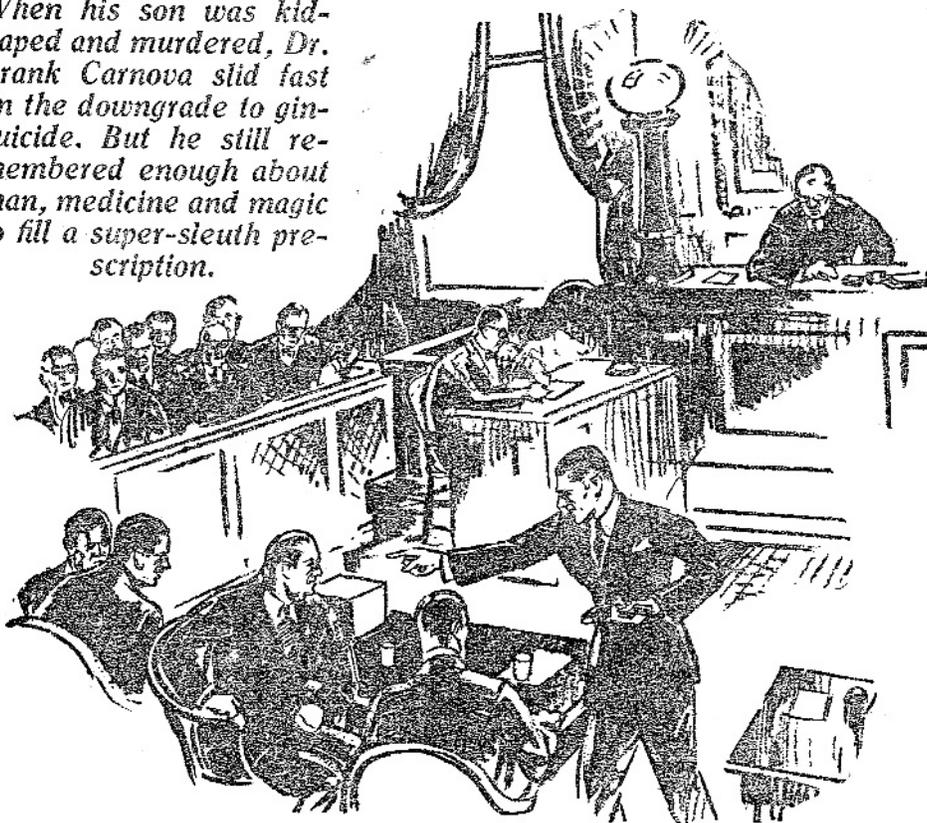


Prescription for Doom

When his son was kidnaped and murdered, Dr. Frank Carnova slid fast on the downgrade to gin-suicide. But he still remembered enough about man, medicine and magic to fill a super-sleuth prescription.



He feared that the jury's verdict would be acquittal.

By G. T. Fleming-Roberts

Author of "Swing, Killer, Swing!" etc.

BILL STENN looked around the room. He took it all in from the fly-specked light bulb in the stained ceiling to the frayed rug on the floor. He didn't miss the couch with its cushion that was like a relief map of the Smoky Mountains. He didn't miss the whisky bottles on the floor, either.

Bill Stenn thought this was a hell of a place for a one-time successful doctor to end up in. Bill Stenn hated his job of helping to finish Dr. Frank Carnova. There are some murderers you like to nab and others you want to congratulate.

He looked around the filthy little shack

and thought of what Cliff Banning had done to Frank. And when he thought about it like that he wanted to go down to headquarters, throw his badge on the chief's desk, tell the chief that the law was an ass and it was okay by him if Frank Carnova killed guys like Banning. Even okay to kill them the way Banning had been killed.

Anyway, Frank Carnova was crazy. He'd been crazy ever since his little son had been kidnaped and murdered. And he kept getting crazier all the time. It wasn't that sort of madness that creates sensation, not the sort you'd expect to pull a torso

murder. It was more like a driving fanaticism, the creed of which was to live life up all at once and get it over with.

Bill Stenn looked around the crummy little shanty and thought about where Carnova had once lived on the Boulevard. Bill Stenn had been there lots of times during the kidnaping investigation and during the trial in which they tried to prove Cliff Banning the kidnap-murderer.

Banning was the kid-killer. Bill Stenn had proved it. He had brought in an eye witness to the job. But the eye witness happened to be a bum just off a freight, and therefore a mush-brained jury had discounted the evidence.

THE loss of her son had killed Mrs. Carnova. And the doc, after spending dough on the ransom that didn't do any good and then depositing thirty thousand dollars reward for the man who could bring in the killer dead or alive, took what little money he had left, took this river shanty, and went at the business of drinking himself to death.

Only Carnova was tougher inside than he had anticipated. All he was doing was drinking himself nuts. His brain was dying faster than his body.

Two years ago, Cliff Banning, the kid-killer, had walked out of court a free man. And in two years young Dr. Carnova had aged twenty.

Bill Stenn sat down on an orange crate to wait for Carnova to come in. It was damned uncomfortable. A lounge chair would have been uncomfortable under the circumstances. Nothing Carnova had done to Banning was enough. It was tough to be the dick who had to make the pinch. Bill Stenn hurled his cold cigar from his mouth to the floor. He cursed. It wasn't justice, damn it!

And then he heard Frank Carnova's feet shuffling on the three sagging steps outside

the shanty and suddenly Bill Stenn remembered he was a cop.

Doc Carnova came into the shanty. For a long time he stood in the doorway, looking as though he'd have to lean on something any moment, but putting that moment off indefinitely. He was a tall man with a starved-looking frame and sunken blue eyes shot with the redness whisky makes. He had a sensitive-looking nose, a fine mouth that had grown lax. His hair was nearly white, though he must have been in his early forties.

He gave Bill a horrible, vacant, deadpan stare and then his eyes gradually brightened and he stumbled to the couch and sat down. The side pockets of his shiny serge suit coat had ballast in them—whisky bottles.

Frank Carnova hauled out one of the bottles and tried to get the cap off. But his fingers had the shakes and his eyes were blurry. He handed the bottle to Bill Stenn and said: "You do it."

Bill Stenn did it and then turned the bottle up and let the whisky gurgle out on the floor. Frank Carnova watched with lusterless eyes. When the whisky was all over the floor and the fumes of it mingled with a dozen less pleasant odors in the room, Frank Carnova said, "Damn, but you drink fast," to the floor. And then he laughed. It wasn't a sane man's laugh.

Bill Stenn stood up. He wasn't as tall as the doc, but now that Carnova was seated Bill towered over him. Bill was heavier through the shoulders and hips. He was blond, small-nosed, puffy about the cheeks and mouth but nowhere else. He was mostly muscle.

Bill said: "You know why I did that? I don't want to have to carry you into headquarters as long as you can walk. You can walk, can't you?"

Frank didn't say anything. He was fumbling with the cap of the second bottle

of whisky.

Bill said: "I'm taking you in for murder. I hope you understand I don't blame you for what you did. You'll get off on an insanity plea. I don't like the job but I expect to live a while after I do some things I don't like to do."

He reached into his pocket and jingled handcuffs. Then he said: "Maybe we don't need these, Frank. You'll just come along, won't you? I mean, you don't give a damn, now you killed the guy, do you?"

"I don't give a damn," Frank Carnova said, standing up but not steadily. "Who did I kill?"

Bill Stenn's jaw sagged. He pushed his hat on the back of his head and looked at Frank Carnova. "You're plenty good," he said. "You got no worries. You'd convince any jury. Let's go, huh?"

"All right," Frank said. He went out the door first and stood on the three tumbledown steps, his long body waving back and forth, looking down between three willows at the moonlight on the river.

BILL STENN put another cigar in his mouth, not as though he relished it, closed Frank Carnova's door for him, took hold of Frank's arm mostly to keep Frank on his feet. Frank weaved along beside Bill Stenn up the path and to the end of the Senate Avenue bridge where the police car was parked. Six feet from the car, Frank said:

"This is all all right, but who was it I killed, I'm asking."

"For Pete's sake," Bill Stenn said. He opened the door of the coupe and helped Frank Carnova in. "I don't know why I should tell you, but it was Cliff Banning."

Frank Carnova swung his long legs around and tried to get out of the car. He stumbled and fell almost to the ground before Bill caught him under the armpits and pulled him to his feet. Carnova's body

was trembling all over. Almost you could hear his joints rattle, he was that thin. He said:

"Cliff Banning's dead? I heard you say that, Stenn, but I hear things sometimes when they aren't there. Cliff Banning's dead?"

Bill backed Carnova against the car and held him up with one hand. "He's dead. I'm taking you in for killing him. I said you'll get off on an insanity plea, didn't I? You killed him, disjointed his body, put him in that boat house down by the bend, set the place on fire. You'll get off all right if a mush-brained jury doesn't get the notion you're the Cleveland Torso Killer and heat the mob up to a lynching."

Carnova sat down on the running board. His lean fingers meshed over his face and his red-shot eyes stared up at Bill Stenn. "When?" he asked.

"Last night," Bill said. "The fire department put out the fire before the body was entirely consumed. The coroner figures the kill for somewhere between nine last night and three this morning. We found Cliff Banning's clothes a little way back of your shack in a hole, as though you'd tried to bury them and got tired."

"You—you're sure?"

"Sure? Sure I'm sure. Aren't you? The butchering was a professional job, it happened near your dump. You had a motive. You had the biggest motive a guy can have. Cliff Banning was the bird who kidnaped your kid and killed him."

"I mean, you're sure it was Banning? If the man was burned, how can you be sure?"

"I said the fire department stopped the fire. The body was pretty well burned, but there was no mistaking Banning's right foot. Or maybe you don't remember. He had a club foot. It would have showed up even if the flesh had all been burned off, which it wasn't."

Carnova said: "Where's that other bottle I had?"

"You don't need a drink, doc," Bill told him. "You'll be so shaky with another under your belt you can't sign a confession."

"I don't want to sign a confession," Carnova said. "Because I didn't kill Banning. I wish I had. But I didn't do it. I couldn't have done it, that's all, because I know where I was last night and so do some other people. I was over at Sandy's having a few drinks. In fact, I slept there."

Bill Stenn scowled. He took hold of Frank Carnova's coat front and lifted him a little way and shoved him into the seat of the car. He said: "I've busted some swell alibis in my time, doc."

Frank Carnova grinned foolishly. "Before you take me up or go breaking alibis, take me to the morgue. I want to see the body. I want to gloat."

Bill Stenn shuddered a little as he started the motor. The guy was nuts—plain unsalted nuts. Just the same, Bill drove him to the morgue.

CARNOVA didn't gloat. He looked indifferently at what was bundled up in the white cloth in the morgue. He looked at the blackened, hairless lump that had been the head, the blistered torso, the disjointed legs. And there was no mistaking Cliff Banning's club foot.

Bill Stenn put his hand down on the knee joint of the severed right leg. He said: "A professional job here. And then you went haywire, doc, and hacked him up plenty."

Carnova took hold of the edge of the morgue table. His long body was swaying back and forth. He said: "Did I?" His head, bobbing uncertainly on his gaunt neck, turned so that his eyes compassed the refrigeration room. There was nothing there to see but walls of little coolers for

cadavers and a spotlessly clean floor and ceiling.

"Where's Banning's clothes?" he asked. "Can I see them?"

Bill Stenn took Frank Carnova into the morgue superintendent's office where he got a kraft paper sack which contained the clothes of the dead man. "Banning's all right," Bill said. "It's the same damn suit he wore at the trial. We double-checked with his clothier."

Frank Carnova picked up the coat, pants, two pieces of underwear and shirt. His shaky fingers tugged at cloth, getting arms and legs inside out. His bloodshot eyes gleamed and his lax lips were twisted into something like a snarl. Inside out, he flattened a trouser leg down on the table.

There was a little brown bug, flat-bodied and not much larger than a dried lentil, on the inner seam of the trouser leg. Carnova shoved the pants aside with a drunken gesture. He kept turning the clothes inside out. He even tore the shirt a little.

Bill Stenn said: "Hey, there!"

Frank laughed hoarsely: "Well, what of it. He won't wear this shirt any more, will he?"

On the inside of the shirt there was another of those little bugs. Frank looked at it. His head wobbled. He looked dazedly at Bill Stenn. "Let's go somewhere and drink strong coffee," he said.

"You can get strong coffee in jail," Bill said. "Let's go, doc."

Carnova brushed a stray lock of gray hair back from his forehead with a limp hand. He said: "You can get coffee in jail, but it's not strong enough. Anyway, I'm not pinched. I was under a table at Sandy's last night. They're still breaking cops for false arrests."

Bill Stenn looked hard into Carnova's gaunt face, old too soon, hollow-eyed. Carnova was a beggar, that was all. The

last thing he had in the world had been his house. He'd sold that to establish a reward fund for the man who brought in the killer of his little boy, dead or alive. Carnova was just a filthy old beggar. But he still had the illusion he was somebody. He was talking about breaking cops now.

And then Bill Stenn got to thinking maybe the doc was hungry. Maybe that was why he wanted to get some coffee. So he said: "Okay, we'll go out and get some coffee."

But he bought a steak for the doc and Carnova ate it ravenously. He kept saying: "Bill, I've gone a long way. I've gone a hell of a long way, Bill. A long way."

And that didn't mean anything. Or maybe it meant a lot.

And when the meal was over, Carnova insisted on taking the check. The doc had never been a piker. Bill Stenn remembered champagne cocktails in the doc's house on the Boulevard. But Carnova couldn't pay the restaurant check because he didn't have any money. He felt in his pants pockets and coat pockets, but he just didn't have any money. He wanted to fight with Bill because Bill took the check from him and paid it. And then Bill helped him out the door of the restaurant and into the police car.

In the police car, Doc Carnova sagged forward and went to sleep. Bill delivered him to the little river shanty, put him to bed, left him there. Because if Carnova's alibi didn't hold the doc would still be there in the morning.

THIS man Sandy, who ran the tavern Carnova frequented, was a barrel-bodied little man with surprised eyes, cupid eyebrows, and pale baby fuzz on top of his rounded head. He had a reputation for knowing all the worst people and it wasn't impossible that an alibi for murder could be purchased from him.

Bill Stenn wandered into the tap room and nodded at Sandy who was behind the bar. He said: "We talk somewhere quiet."

Sandy bobbed his head and led the way through a small door back of the bar and into his cubby hole of an office. "Now what have I done?" he asked.

"I don't know yet," Bill said, "but I'll find out. Do you know where Frank Carnova was last night?"

Sandy nodded. "I'll say I do. He fell under the table about eleven o'clock after four hours of drinking. And he stayed there. You know how tender-hearted I am? Well, when he wouldn't wake up, I just let him lay where he was. I cooked him an egg for breakfast this morning when I opened up."

Bill nodded. "For how much?"

Sandy's eyes widened. "For how—say, what is this? I ain't used to having my charity questioned. I just feel sorry for the guy after all that happened to him. Personally, I'd like it if he'd go jump in the lake. He's drinking himself to death and I don't think he's got any life insurance I could attach. Would you like to see how much he owes me for liquor?"

Bill nodded.

Sandy opened the desk and took out a ledger. He showed Bill a page marked "Carnova" and there were a couple of hundred small neat "X" marks stringing across and down the page. So if Carnova had bought an alibi, what did he use for money?

Anyway, the way Bill figured it, if Carnova wanted to die, why bother with an alibi. So he told Sandy to be conventional and went off to report to headquarters that it still looked like Carnova did the killing of Banning, only he couldn't have.

Two days later, Bill Stenn and the rest of the homicide squad went down to Liberty Street because a man had died. The man was a doctor with a shady but

lucrative practice in a pretty vicious section of the city.

The doctor's name was Wilbur Timmonds and he had been a fat, baldheaded vulture, amazingly skillful at surgery. He could have been famous had he not been more interested in gold that was in the gutters of Liberty Street. He had died from being shot at too much.

Liberty Street was in an uproar because its doctor had been murdered. Everybody wanted to involve everybody else in the crime and Bill Stenn finally climbed into his cop's car, opened the windows to the cool October air, and went for a fast ride to see if he could stop his headache. He ended up at the foot of Senate Avenue Bridge, where he got out and walked down the path to Carnova's shack.

The ex-doctor was awake and sober. Some of the red had gone out of his eyes. He was still shaky, but he was probably always going to be that. His smile was bitter but it was still a smile, and he was occupying himself with an old salad dressing jar which had a clean amber liquid in it.

"Come in, Stenn, come in," Carnova urged, waving elaborately at the ancient couch. "Take a load off your fallen arches."

BILL gave Carnova a one-sided glance. The guy looked almost sane. There were no whisky bottles around the floor, but there were other bottles, smaller ones like the salad dressing jar Carnova had.

Bill sat down on the couch and wriggled around to find a valley in its mountainous cushion. "What you got in that jar, doc?" he asked.

"Beef broth," Carnova said. "I ought to have gelatin, but it isn't cold enough."

Bill decided the doc was still crazy. Just the same he asked: "Did you know a Dr. Timmonds?"

Carnova put the jar down on the

window sill. He looked soberly at Bill and nodded. "We were in medical school together. He ended up in Liberty Street, putting patches on a sick underworld." He laughed shortly. "If I was still in the profession, I couldn't say that on account of ethics. But to hell with that."

"He ended up in the morgue this morning," Bill said.

Carnova frowned slightly. "It's getting to be a habit with you. Any time anybody dies you look me up. I didn't kill Timmonds either, but I don't happen to have an alibi. I haven't been in Sandy's joint for so long—well for two days, I guess. How did Timmonds die?"

"Bullets," Bill said. "A female, whose name I got somewhere in my notebook but who would come without calling, said she saw a guy come out of Timmonds' office late last night. The guy could have been you."

"What size bullets?" Carnova asked.

Bill told him it was a .32 that had finished Timmonds.

Carnova went to an old packing box the front of which was covered with a piece of muslin draped curtain-fashion. He pushed back the curtain and took out a small revolver. "This is the only gun I've got. I got it for—for my wife. It was for her protection when I was out on all night cases. It's a twenty-two pop gun."

Bill dismissed the idea with a gesture. "You're too damned touchy. I didn't say you did it. I just came out here for a drink, that's all."

Carnova looked through the dirty front window and down toward the river. He smiled a little. "I got lots of water, haven't I?"

Bill didn't have any answer for that one. He could see that Frank Carnova was trying to come back. The poor doc was trying to get back on his feet. And the guy's brain was as fumbly as his fingers.

Maybe he imagined he was a doctor again. Maybe that was why he'd got all those bottles and jars out of the dump—he thought he was fixing up a laboratory. It was kind of like a kid playing mud pies.

A few days after that Frank Carnova was playing a new game. Now he was a detective. He kept hanging around police headquarters, where he was treated one way and another.

Some of the men were like Bill Stenn and felt sorry for the doc. Then there were others who thought that Carnova had pulled the torso killing of Banning. They tried to get Carnova to talk about it. They figured if they could get him drunk he'd open up. And while Frank Carnova was going to stop drinking he just couldn't stop all at once.

He nearly passed out in the detective room one day. Bill Stenn came in and a dick named Bresslov had been trying to get Carnova tight so he would talk. Bill Stenn took Bresslov to one side and said:

"The next guy I see handing doc a drink I'm going to murder, see? The old boy is trying to reform. He can't do it, but he can't even try with guys like you around."

"Listen," Bresslov said, "somebody's got to take an interest in the Banning killing. You sure ain't."

"It's the chief's business to decide about that," Bill said. "Whenever he thinks it's your job to work on the Banning kill or the Timmonds kill either, I guess you'll know about it from him. Till then, I'll handle things my own way. And what I said goes about doc and the bottle and you going to the morgue. Or anyway a hospital."

Bill went to the other side of the room where Frank Carnova was lolling on a bench, his eyes getting glassy, a bottle of whisky Bresslov had given him between his knees.

Bill took the bottle away from Frank. Frank watched him and nodded. "Yes," he said, "that's right. You keep it away from me, Bill."

AND then Bill understood why Carnova hung around. Ever since that night Bill had taken the whisky from Carnova and poured it out on the floor, Carnova had the notion that Bill was trying to keep drink away from him. And that was what Frank wanted him to do now. He wanted Bill to help him come back. But why? What did Carnova have to come back to?

Bill Stenn sat down right then and decided he would find out just what was in Carnova's mind, if any. He was going to put it to him square and see if he couldn't get some sort of answer he could understand.

"Listen, doc—"

Carnova's bobbing head turned so that his eyes met Bill's. He said: "I'm listening."

And then somebody opened the door of the detective room and yelled at Bill Stenn: "Sarg, there's a guy out here who wants to see you. He says it's important."

Bill said to send the guy in. And then he started to get mad when the visitor came in lugging a big square sample case that you could tell was filled with antiseptic soap because of the smell.

Bill stood up and gave the man the once-over preparatory to telling him where he could go. The man was tall, had hair that was yellow, eyes that were dark. He had an absurd pug nose, a mouth full of gold teeth. Under each eye was a little patch of white scar as though he had been in a fight with a pug who liked to mark a man symmetrically.

The man switched his sample case to his left hand and put out his right to Bill. "I am Jack Wharton—"

"And I don't want any. Anybody who

uses your product must feel like they was embalmed,” Bill said.

Jack Wharton smiled. “Could I interest you in some information concerning the kidnaping of little David Carnova, Sergeant Stenn?”

Bill said: “Huh?”

Frank Carnova got off the bench and stood up. His gaunt body was trembling. He put his glassy stare on Jack Wharton and kept it there. His face flushed darkly, a sudden and unhealthy flare of color.

Jack Wharton put down his sample case and took a billfold from his inner pocket and carefully removed a twenty dollar bill from it. He said:

“I understand there is a thirty thousand dollar reward for the man who finds the kidnap slayer of David Carnova?”

Frank Carnova said, “Yes, yes,” in a hoarse whisper that Wharton could scarcely have heard. Bill Stenn nodded his head.

“Well,” Wharton said, “I guess I earned myself a piece of change. Here’s one of the hot bills that Doctor Carnova passed out as ransom money. And when you guarantee me the reward I’ll take you to the dirty rat I got the money from.”

Bill Stenn took the bill from Wharton’s hand and looked at it. It was just what the soap salesman said it was; it was hot as hell. Bill said: Okay, Mr. Wharton. I get my hat and we’ll go with you. You’ll get the reward and you won’t have to split it with nobody but your wife.”

“You take a gun,” Wharton said. “I got one, but I’m not such a good shot.” He added hastily: “I got a permit to carry one.”

“Is this guy tough?” Bill asked.

“He looks plenty tough,” Wharton said. “Maybe you better take a squad.”

Bill shook his head. “We’ll go it alone. You want the reward and I want the credit.”

Frank Carnova grabbed Bill’s arm. “I’m going,” he said. “You can’t make me

stay back.”

Bill looked at him, looked at that intense, fanatical gleam in Carnova’s eye. He knew there wasn’t any way to keep Frank back unless he locked him up. And after all, this moment was what Carnova was living for. If the Wharton guy wasn’t on the level, though, the disappointment would probably kill Frank. Bill said:

“You better stay here, Doc.”

Carnova shook his head. “I’m going. Don’t try to stop me, damn you!”

SO THE three of them went. They went in Jack Wharton’s car because Wharton was afraid a police car would scare the kidnap-killer away. Bill sat up in front with the soap salesman while Frank Carnova slumped in the back seat.

Wharton didn’t say anything on the way. Bill could tell that the paramount thing in his mind was the reward money and he was passing out no information until he was sure of collecting.

He drove unerringly across town and out Indiana Avenue and into the colored district. He stopped the car in front of a dirty three yards square of window that said POOL in white relief letters on it. Beneath this sign was a smaller one in red that announced that chili and oyster stew could also be purchased.

“A white guy runs this,” Wharton said, setting his hand brake. “Let’s go in.”

Getting out of the car, Frank Carnova fell down, his knees were that shaky. He grabbed Jack Wharton’s leg to help him get back on his feet again. Then he staggered after Wharton and Bill Stenn into the combination pool and lunch room.

This early in the evening, there was nobody in the place except the proprietor. Wharton indicated the man and said to Bill: “This is Mr. Shain. I sold him an order of antiseptic soap for his wash room. He gave me the twenty buck bill.”

Bill looked at Shain. He was a dark, spidery man with a nose that somebody's fist had shoved over to one side. He had the hardest mouth; his lips looked capable of biting off a quid of tobacco without assistance of jaws or teeth. His eyes were shifty and nervous.

He said to Bill and Wharton: "What's all this?" His voice was shrill, but thoroughly masculine.

"I think," Bill said, "we'd like to look around your joint. Especially, we'd like to see some of your money."

"What's the matter with my money?" Shain asked, speaking rapidly. "What's this about a twenty dollar bill? Somebody slip me some queer money? And this guy," nodding at Wharton, "I never seen him before. If he tells you I gave him some money, he's a damn liar. I never seen him and I don't give out money anyway."

Bill saw a door at the rear of the room. He started toward it. Shain stepped in his way, a wiry pigmy in front of Bill Stenn.

"You got a search warrant?"

"I don't need one," Bill said. "You want to go down to headquarters and talk about the Carnova snatch? I guess we got you cold, Shain. You got the ransom money here somewhere. I'm finding it. You were a sap to try and pass any of it. It's hot—like you'll be when they shove you into the chair."

Bill grabbed Shain by the back of the neck and the way his fingers closed on Shain made Shain's eyes squeeze out from his puffy lids.

"Listen," Shain said, "you can't pin this on me, I tell you. I'll show you where the money is. I didn't even know it was money until the other day. Cliff Banning gave me a package to take care of for him. When Cliff Banning died, I opened the package, naturally."

Bill's eyes narrowed. "Always, they blame it on some dead guy. Let's go see the money, Shain."

Shain, so scared he could hardly walk, led Bill and Wharton into a little back room just off the kitchen. There was a cabinet of drawers built into one side of the room, and Shain went to it and removed one of the drawers completely, disclosing a hollow place behind it.

Shain reached into it, and just a moment later Bill knew he should have reached in himself. Because Shain pulled a gun.

While Bill was going for his own gun, Shain put a bullet into Bill's shoulder. The impact of the lead spun Bill halfway around. And then there was another shot and Shain fell forward into Bill, taking Bill off balance.

The two of them hit the floor together. Bill was clinging to consciousness by gritting his teeth. Shain was just a twitching lump of flesh.

Bill rolled out from under Shain and saw a smoking gun in Wharton's hand. The yellow-haired soap salesman was giving out with his gilt-edged grin. He said: "Dead or alive, I get the reward."

And Shain was dead. Wharton had got him through the forehead.

Bill, holding tight to his shoulder, nodded toward the hollow place behind the drawer which Shain had removed. "Wharton, you reach in there and see if that's where the money is."

WHARTON did what he was told, brought out a shoe box. Bill only had to look once into the box to see that here was the Carnova ransom money. And if the whole fifty grand of it wasn't here, there was anyway more money in cash than Bill Stenn had ever seen before. He said:

"I guess you get the reward, Wharton, only why the hell did you have to shoot so damned well?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Frank Carnova said.

Bill turned and saw Frank leaning against the door frame. There was a hellish light in Frank's eyes. His hands were fluttering like butterflies, he was that excited or nervous. Then he turned around and walked ahead of them into the pool room.

It was a funny thing, Bill thought, that here in the middle of one of the pool tables was Jack Wharton's soap sample case. He could have sworn that Wharton had left it in the car. The case was open and soap was dumped out on the table. Wharton started for the table in a hurry, a worried look in his dark eyes. Frank Carnova said:

"It's too late. I got there ahead of you. Better sit down. I've got to talk." Nobody sat down. But Wharton stopped in his tracks and looked steadily at Carnova. He said to Bill. "Is the guy crazy?"

"No," Frank said, "I'm not crazy. I just discovered why Dr. Timmonds was killed. I just got everything put together. And I know Cliff Banning isn't dead. Remember the little bugs we found on Banning's clothing there in the morgue, Bill? Those were ticks—the variety of ticks that spread Rocky Mountain spotted fever, a disease that is particularly tough on tramps.

"Those ticks couldn't have come off Banning's body, because we don't have them around here. They came off the body of the bum who was wearing Banning's clothes—the same bum who was an eye witness to Banning's killing of my son.

"The bum came back to town a few days ago and approached Cliff Banning. He wanted money. Maybe he told Banning he had some additional evidence that would enable the state to re-open the case against Banning for kidnaping: Banning gave him

some money and also an old suit, told him to come back later.

"Then Banning went to Dr. Timmonds and had his right leg amputated—the leg with the club foot. Banning knew that he could get an artificial leg that would enable him to walk without Banning's characteristic limp. And he got Timmonds to perform a little plastic surgery on his nose and around his eyes and chin, altering his face completely. He even got gold shells and put them on over his teeth. And he bleached his hair. In other words, Banning just disappeared—disappeared into a new identity."

"The guy's crazy," Wharton said.

Frank Carnova didn't seem to hear. He kept on talking as though he didn't have a whole lot of time to get it all out. "In his new identity, Banning waited for the bum who was the only witness to the kidnap-kill. And when the bum came, this new, disguised Banning killed him, took him to that shanty near the river bend, not far from my shack. There Banning dismembered the body of the bum. He didn't do such a good job of it, as any medical man could see.

"Banning had brought with him, in a soap sample case, his own right leg which Timmonds had amputated—the leg with the club foot that would identify the dismembered body as Banning's. He put his own right leg with the rest of the hacked-up body and took the bum's right leg with him in the sample case, because the corpse couldn't have three legs.

"Then he fired the building and went away. He preserved the leg of the man he had murdered. He carries it with him all the time in the false bottom of that soap sample case. The embalming preparation he used on the severed leg smells worse than the soap. I just had a look at the leg. Bill, you'd better take a look at it, too. You can see the tick bites on the bum's leg. And, to make sure that Dr. Timmonds didn't give the

whole thing away, Banning shot Timmonds.

“The whole idea was to make himself safe by faking his own death, frame me with the killing, and put the blame of the kidnaping on Shain and collect the reward money. Shain was just taking care of the hot money for Banning. Banning never got anything out of the kidnaping because the ransom money was marked.”

FRANK CARNOVA’S gleaming eyes never left Wharton’s face all the time he was talking. He seemed to hold Wharton with a sort of super-human hypnotic power. Or maybe Wharton was just scared stiff. Frank Carnova said:

“Hello there, Cliff Banning. That’s a nice artificial leg you’re wearing, as I found out when I fell out on the sidewalk a little while ago. I grabbed your leg to help myself up with. It isn’t a flesh-and-blood leg, Mr. Banning.”

Bill Stenn tried to draw his gun with his left hand as Mr. Banning-Wharton spun around and dashed toward the rear door of the pool room. Banning-Wharton fired two shots over his shoulder and both were misses.

Carnova had his wife’s little .22 caliber popgun out, but in his shaky hands it was just a miracle that in a half dozen shots one of them nipped Banning-Wharton’s arm. Banning-Wharton got through the door and latched it on the other side.

It was about that time that the loss of blood got Bill Stenn. He remembered throwing himself weakly against the locked door and then collapsing on the floor. He came to some time later in the ambulance that was taking him to the city hospital, opened his eyes, saw that Frank Carnova, a fixed smile on his lips, was riding beside him.

Frank said: “You’re going to be all right, Bill.”

Bill said: “Yah, I know, but did they get Banning?”

Frank said: “Don’t worry about that. He’ll give himself up, Bill.”

Bill shook his head. “Not that guy. It’s going to be another long manhunt.”

“He’ll give himself up,” Frank said, “but I don’t think he’ll talk.”

Bill lapsed into unconsciousness again.

Three weeks later, Bill Stenn traveled out to Iowa to pick up Cliff Banning. The man was in a hospital there, suffering from an advanced case of lockjaw caused by the wound of a .22 caliber bullet in his arm. He had given himself up to a doctor only after it was just about too late to do anything about it. And when Bill got there Banning was dead.

He asked Frank Carnova about that when he got back. How had Frank been so sure that Banning would give himself up. Carnova laughed a little.

“My hands were too shaky for accurate shooting and I had a feeling I was going to get a chance to shoot Banning. I knew that as soon as I examined the body in the morgue—the dismembered body you thought was Banning’s—and as soon as I found the ticks in Banning’s clothes. I knew that body wasn’t Banning’s. Somehow I knew I’d meet Banning again.”

“So,” Bill said, “you put some bugs on the bullets in your gun so that even a little wound would assure us of getting Banning?”

Frank Carnova nodded. “Tetanus germs abound in most any city dump. I made a culture on them in broth in a salad dressing jar. Then I drilled little holes in the lead points of bullets I was, going to use in my gun, dipped the bullets in the culture. Banning might get away from you or from me, but not from the little germs he couldn’t fight.”