

# Five Tickets to Hell



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*Detective Al Marble found that being a friend to a cadaver has its trigger price. For when he tried to rundown the vanished killer, he ran himself into a homicide parade.*

**F**OR the first time in a good many years I saw Jud Purdy at a rococo place called *Dimitri's*. He looked plenty fried and he was bucking the wheel for all it was worth and he was winning. Standing at his elbow and looking wistful was a lacquered blonde who belonged in a Broadway chorus.

I wasn't particularly surprised to see him

back in town; they all come back sooner or later. But I was glad to see him again. I caught his eye and I grinned, and he looked right through me. That's right, not the faintest recognition. Well, I didn't like that one bit. We'd been pals once.

I'd edged into *Dimitri's* from the cold outside, and the warmth had made my face burn and then ache. In the cocktail lounge I

ran into a man whose name was Bender, or Binder, something like that—I'd seen him hanging around before—and he greeted me like a long-lost brother. He was a little sawed-off heel, a penny-ante chiseler, with a nose long enough to reach from Broadway to Fifth Avenue and fingers as sticky as fly paper.

He said brightly:

“Why, hullo, Mr. Marble. How's the keyhole-peeping racket today? Hear you had a run-in with Marty Kyle this morning.”

Was that any of his business? I got him by the front of his powder-blue coat and almost lifted him off his feet.

“What did you hear?”

He almost squealed. “Why, I heard that you punched Marty so hard that he went through the door of your office without bothering to open it first.”

“You're sure you heard that?”

His eyes got big and round. “On second thought,” he bleated, “I didn't hear a thing.”

I told him that was better and let go of his coat. As a matter of fact, I had taken a poke at Marty Kyle earlier in the day. I like Marty Kyle about as much as I like parsnips, which is not at all. He's mixed up in all sorts of vice—crooked politics and women and dope. Not that I give a particular damn about that.

But when he starts carrying the torch for a little gal I've known most of my life—well, that's something else again. And when he wants me to find her after she's managed to escape him, well—my fist was still a little sore where I'd landed on his jaw.

I WENT through the cocktail lounge into the main room, and that was when I saw Jud Purdy and the lacquered blonde. And as I say, Jud cut me dead. I didn't like that, but if that was the way he wanted it, okay. I've been dropped by people before.

I sat down at the bar and ordered a whisky sour, and I couldn't help staring at

Jud in the bar mirror and remembering. I remembered him as a nice kid with dark hair and clean gray eyes and too much money. The money hadn't hurt him. He got just as much fun hoisting beers in some dive with a truck driver as he did sipping champagne cocktails with a debutante in some swank night club. It wasn't sham or pretense. The point is, he was always vitally interested in people.

That's the way I remembered him. I watched him in the mirror and I wondered if my memory was wrong. He seemed changed and I didn't like it. He'd always been able to handle liquor, and here he was about ready to fall down. I didn't like it.

I looked away for a second, and when I looked back he was coming toward me. His legs didn't track quite right. He pulled out a stool and sat down beside me.

“Al Marble,” he said, slapping me on the back. “Imagine running into you. Al, you remember me?”

His eyes were lowered so that I could not see them. His voice was a little fuzzy. But there was something else about him, something intense, a tautness, which made me wonder if my memory hadn't been right after all.

“It's been ten years, Al,” he said, still not looking at me.

Ten years is a long time. His father lost his money in the crash, all of it. Jud disappeared. For a while he was a professional gambler; then he tried his hand at running booze over the border, and then he went down to South America with an expedition that was looking for an American flyer who had cracked up in the jungle. That's the last I'd heard of him.

I said: “Sure, Jud. I remember.”

He looked up at me then, grinning like an idiot. And then the grin slid from his face, and I knew that my memory of him had been right. I took a deep breath and I felt a whole lot better. He was no more drunk than I was.

The whole thing was an act.

Then he grasped my arm. In the mirror I could see the blonde approaching. Jud leaned close.

“Listen, Al. I can trust you, can’t I?”

I said that he could—he really knew it anyway. The blonde was getting closer. There was no one near us except Dimitri, who was leaning against a pillar and looking down at his polished nails.

Jud whispered: “Keep something for me until tomorrow?”

And he didn’t even wait for an answer. He slipped a small envelope into my hand, and I got it tucked away with a minimum of display. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Bender, or Binder, standing in the doorway leading to the cocktail lounge. Dimitri did not even seem to be watching us.

Then the blonde had him. He got that idiotic grin working again and drifted away. He flipped a hand at me, and once again his legs weren’t tracking right.

**D**IMITRI eased up beside me with the feline grace of a cat. He murmured in an accent thick enough to be sliced with a knife: “That one, he iss a friend of yours—yess?” Dimitri was a sleek, swarthy man, very carefully groomed, and he hissed his words the way the Japanese are supposed to do. I didn’t like him.

I said: “Never saw him before in my life.”

Dimitri smiled thinly. “He iss a vairy lucky man, that one.”

I asked him if it broke his heart to see somebody winning at one of his gambling tables, and his smile was as thin as the edge of a razor blade. “You say somet’ing then, my friend.”

Just then I saw Jud and the blonde leaving. Something began bothering me, and about ten seconds later I figured it out. Jud was in danger of some kind—why else would he have trusted me with the envelope?

And the envelope must have been important. Jud must be in trouble, maybe his life was even in danger.

I’d kept him out of trouble in the past—once his old man had even hired me as a bodyguard—and I figured I might as well try doing it again. There was something pretty important on Jud’s mind.

“But wait!” Dimitri cried, grabbing my arm. “You cannot leave in such a hurry. I have something to show you.”

I shook my arm loose and told him where to go. His eyes were small and bright with anger, glittering like the eyes of a cat. He began straightening his tie.

“Pardon. Another time—yess?” I didn’t even answer. And what his stall was, if any, I didn’t try to figure out. I ran through the cocktail lounge toward the street entrance, and on the way I ran into a little trouble.

Bender, or Binder, or whatever his name was, was standing in my way. I ran into him, tripped, stumbled, and we both fell down. I was on top. He worked his way out from underneath with the agility of a monkey and helped me up. He started to apologize, but I didn’t have time to listen.

I made the street about as fast as anyone could, short of jumping out the window. But when I got there Jud was gone.

A taxi driver was standing beside his cab, stamping his feet in snow. There had been no snow an hour before. I asked him about Jud. I described Jud’s face, his clothing, his general appearance, and by the time I got to Jud’s hair, the hackie was lifting his arm to point south.

His arm had a curious crooked twist to it. I remember that distinctly because I was looking at it when I heard the shots.

They came from the direction in which he was pointing, but how far away I couldn’t tell because of the muffling effect of the snow. There were two of them in rapid succession and then another and then silence.

I had a pretty good idea what they meant.

The taxi driver slowly let his arm drop and he leaned back against the cab. "They sounded like shots," he mumbled.

Jud Purdy was lying on his back, and light from a street lamp and white snow sifted down across his face. One arm was flung outward, still clutching a black automatic, and blood was thick on his chest and in the snow beside him.

A big man was on one knee bending over the body; another stood near-by wearing a sign on his chest which said *I Am Blind*, a newsboy was running from the south clutching a bundle of papers under his arm.

The man wearing the *I Am Blind* sign was wiping off his glasses with a handkerchief. He recited woodenly: "A man shot him. A man got out of a car and shot him. He got out of the car and shot him and then drove away."

THE man bending over the body climbed to his feet and absently wiped the snow off his knees. I recognized him as Big Munn, the cop on the beat. His rubber coat made a soft rustling sound as he took a notebook from an inside pocket.

Big Munn said: "The guy who shot him went through his pockets. There were two men in the car. Two men and a girl. A blonde."

The money Jud had won at *Dimitri's* was gone.

Jud's lips parted. "Orient . . . waterfront . . . Shanley, Shanley. . . ." He choked then, his body went rigid, and then blood filled his throat.

That didn't mean anything to me. "Orient . . . waterfront . . . Shanley. . . ." Big Munn glanced slyly at me, saw my blank expression. He could tell that I didn't know any more than he did himself.

"Too bad he didn't live thirty seconds longer," he said.

The taxi driver was still leaning against his cab when I went back. His eyes were

tightly shut, and I had to touch his arm to make him open them. I asked about the girl.

He began scrubbing his face with the palm of his hand, and it sounded like sandpaper going across wood. "They come out here—see? They come out and stop there." He pointed to a spot six feet away. "Well, the dame wants to go one place, the guy another. Her name is Sadie. And she gets mad—see?—wanting this guy to tag along with her and him not wanting to.

"You know how it is—she's a B-girl at *Dimitri's* and maybe this guy has dough or something. But the guy won't go with her, see? He laughs and hands her something and then he walks off alone down the street. Was he the one who got shot?"

"What happened then?"

"Well, the dame crosses the street. A big car pulls up beside her and she acts scared. She sort of pulls back for a second and then I can't see what happens, and then the car drives off with her in it."

That was that. I went back into *Dimitri's* for another drink. Bender, or Binder, was gone. Dimitri was standing just as I had left him. He was leaning against a pillar and looking down at his nails, but when he saw me he stopped gazing at them and looked at me instead.

"You are back," he said. "Will you come with me, my friend?"

Something hit me then, something I hadn't figured before. I forgot about the drink and followed him. His private office was done in blue and white. There was a large desk and several chairs covered with white leather.

He pulled out the top drawer of the desk and handed me a check which was marked N S F across the face with a rubber stamp.

The check, he explained carefully, had been given to him in settlement of a gambling debt. It wasn't any good. He didn't like welshers, but on the other hand he didn't like trouble. So would I collect it for him,

since he knew that the man was able to pay.

I threw the check into his fat face and got my fingers around his throat. All I could think of was Jud Purdy lying dead under a street lamp with snow sifting down across his face.

“You had Jud Purdy killed,” I said, tightening my fingers. “This check business was only a stall. You had your hoods kill him because he was leaving your place winners. You wanted your money back.”

He managed to squeeze a few words past my fingers: “But I did not even know him. And I have no gunmen any more. Only Frank Brock, and I only keep him because of old times.”

I remembered that was true. Since repeal he had been operating a legal business, with the exception of his gaming tables. I said: “You don’t have to know a man to kill him.”

Silently he picked up the check and put it away again in the top drawer of his desk. When his hand came out, there was a gun in it. His eyes hated me.

“You are the suspicious one, my friend.” His tone was smooth again. “I do not have to kill for a few dollars. Besides, you were the last to see him alive. Perhaps you needed money so you followed him and—”

**H**IS smile was nasty. Only the gun in his hand saved him then. A bottle of whisky and glasses were on a tray on his desk. He let me pour a drink, keeping me covered. I raised the glass as high as my shoulder and then threw glass and all in his face.

Perhaps he could have shot me. I don’t know. All I know is that he was never a man for action. Anyway, he went over backward, the chair on top of him. I was a close second. I landed on his chest and wrestled the gun out of his hand.

“You had Jud Purdy killed, you—”

The sound of feet came from the corridor outside, and I stopped talking. I guess we’d

been making a lot of noise. The door opened and Frankie Brock backed inside, his gun out and pointing down the corridor. His face was white and strained.

“Boss,” he croaked, “two guys. Tough guys. Comin’ here.”

A window looked out on a back court and I raised it. It was dark and I couldn’t see much, but below was a small shed with a sloping roof, and beside it were empty packing crates outlined against the snow. I didn’t know what was coming down the hall; all I knew was that I should get away from there.

Two men charged in. They didn’t even look at Dimitri or at Frankie—they looked at me. I went out of the window and dropped a dozen feet, and then I was half-sliding, half-rolling down the sloping roof of the shed.

The snow broke my fall a little. A slug parted my hair. My left leg hurt where I landed on it and twisted it under me. That didn’t stop my running. Somebody called something. Another shot sounded. Then I was in the street, traffic speeding past. I felt a little better, stopping to catch up with my breathing.

I still had the notion that Dimitri had had Jud killed because of the money Jud had won. But another thought was coming into my mind. That envelope Jud had given me to keep for him—maybe somebody was after it. The two men who had charged into Dimitri’s office were after me, not Dimitri.

I reached into my pocket for the envelope. It was gone.

The same taxi driver was standing in front of *Dimitri’s*, blowing on his hands. I asked him if he knew where Sadie lived, and he said yes, he did. I climbed in and he hauled the flag up and we started off. I made the mistake of telling him I was in a hurry. The fact that there was snow on the street didn’t make any difference. We slid most of the way.

The apartment where he dropped me was

a brick building with an inset court and a tiny foyer. I told him to wait. On one of the mailboxes was the name *Sadie Andrews: Room 304*. It was the only Sadie listed.

"What is it?" a frightened voice called through the door when I knocked. I didn't know what the best answer would be, so I took a chance. I said that I was a friend of Dimitri's. That was the wrong answer, because she didn't seem to like it one bit.

"Go 'way."

"Listen, this is important."

The door opened perhaps six inches and I got my foot in the way so that she couldn't close it. She found that out. Her face didn't look nearly so hard with the makeup off. It looked angry and scared—mostly scared. It was a young face, touched by the beginning of a hangover—and something else which at the moment eluded me.

I told her that I was coming in. She didn't like that either, but there was nothing she could do about it. The room was in disorder. A bag stood packed near the door; another was open on the bed, half full of women's things. I asked her if she were going somewhere.

Her face was streaked with tears. She had been crying and even now she was fighting for control. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose and tried to act tough.

"What if I am?"

I leaned a shoulder against the wall. "Listen. Earlier tonight you were with a man who happened to be a friend. He was killed. You were in the car with the man who killed him."

"Go 'way. You fool, go 'way!" She started going to pieces again.

I STUDIED her face, her expression, the way she held her slim body, her eyes going back over her shoulder from time to time. There was something here that I couldn't understand. For the first time I noticed that she held one hand behind her

back. I got her by the wrist.

She struggled, but I pried her fingers open, and a roll of bills dropped to the floor.

"He gave it to me—honest he did." She began to sob, her shoulders shaking. "He said that he didn't care about the money he won—that he was there for a different reason. So he gave it all to me." She paused a second. "You don't believe me."

I didn't at first. And then I remembered seeing Jud give money to people before, and I remembered what the taxi driver had told me about seeing Jud give the girl something.

She went on: "I want to get away from here. I hate this town! I—but I don't suppose you can understand that. That I'd do almost anything to get away, to get back home. This is the first time that I've had enough money."

Maybe I understood it at that. Small town girl wanting to get back to the country. Sick of Broadway. I remembered what Jud had told me once: that New York can sometimes turn toward you a terrible face.

I said: "Where are the men who were with you?"

"I don't know. Why won't you leave!"

I backed her into a corner. "Where are they?"

"Right behind you, mug," a hoarse voice bit out. "Right here behind you with a gun."

The man was thin and hatchet-faced, and he wore his sandy hair like a shock of wheat. He wore an overcoat but no hat. And behind him was a little sawed-off runt who was scared green.

"Hello, Bender, or Binder, or whatever your name is."

He took off his gray felt hat and mopped his forehead. Swallowing hard, he said: "Bindler, Mr. Marble."

The hatchet-faced one was the hood for me to watch. He looked like a killer. I didn't think he had been one of those who had shot at me in Dimitri's office.

"Chicken feed," he said, touching the roll

of bills on the floor with a toe. “Sister,” he told the girl, “you shoot your face off.”

She didn’t say anything. I knew now that she had been trying to warn me that the two hoods were hiding in the bathroom. Bindler had seen Jud hand me something back at *Dimitri’s*, and he had brought Hatchet-face here, knowing that I’d show up sooner or later.

“Search him,” said Hatchet-face to Bindler. “Get that envelope.”

Bindler didn’t like it. He was scared silly. He was afraid of me, but even more afraid of the man behind him. And besides, the other had a gun and I didn’t.

I waited until Bindler was about a foot, away, keeping my hands up, and then I kicked him hard in the shin.

I kicked him hard and he couldn’t take it. He let out a howl that could have been heard a mile away; he ducked, reaching for his ankle, and I jerked him over between me and the gun as a shield. At first he howled for Hatchet-face to shoot, and then realizing his position he begged him not to. His hat fell off and rolled across the floor. He was so scared now that he didn’t know whether he was coming or going.

Very calmly Hatchet-face fired, hoping to get me through Bindler. Bindler’s body jerked in my hands, and the impact shoved me backwards. The slug didn’t reach me. Then I got both hands against Bindler’s chest and heaved. His body sailed backward in a beautiful arc and slammed squarely into Hatchet-face.

**H**E tripped and went down, and as I dived for him I remembered something which I had forgotten. I remembered bumping into Bindler earlier in the evening. We had both gone down and he had been on his feet first. In that time he had picked my pockets. He had seen Jud hand me the envelope and he wanted it. He had bumped into me on purpose.

I landed squarely on top of Hatchet-face. He tried to swing his gun on me, but we both had our hands on it. I was the stronger but I could not wrestle the gun away from him. The blonde began to scream. Hatchet-face struggled all the harder. Then there was a muffled explosion and he went limp. A slug from his own gun, the trigger pulled by his own hand, blew a hole in his side big enough to drive a truck through.

Before getting out of there I searched Bindler. He did not have the envelope, and obviously Hatchet-face didn’t either, or he wouldn’t have told Bindler to search me.

The girl was still screaming and a lot of people were standing in the hall. No one tried to stop me. I went down and climbed into the hack and told the hackie to just drive around.

It looked as if Dimitri was out of it. Much as I hated to admit that his hands were clean, it looked as if that were so. This was something bigger than Dimitri—there were too many hoods after me. It looked as if the hand of a big shot was in it somewhere; but why I didn’t know. Well, there aren’t many really big shots in town, so it could be Marty Kyle. Bindler knew him and I began thinking that I’d seen Hatchet-face with Kyle before.

The envelope business bothered me. Assuming that Bindler had picked my pockets, why had he pointed me out to Hatchet-face, who obviously thought that I still had the envelope? Maybe Bindler was playing a game of his own. If so, if they were all after the envelope—well, it must contain something pretty important.

I thought back over the evening, tried to remember everything that had happened. There had to be a thread somewhere. And then I remembered what Jud had said before he died. “Orient. . . waterfront. . . Shanley. . .” On a sudden hunch I had the hackie stop at a corner drugstore and I used the phone book.

There was a hotel named the Orient listed, and it was near the waterfront. A man named Shanley could be staying there. I hopped back into the cab.

“Hotel Orient,” I said.

It was a dingy frame building badly in need of paint. The boy at the desk had a gray beard and a stupid look on his face. I told him that I wanted to see Shanley.

“Shanley, huh?” he cackled, and I knew that my hunch had been right. Shanley was mixed up in it somewhere and he had a room here.

The key was not in the box, meaning that Shanley was in his room. It cost me five bucks before the old boy at the desk would let me go up without first announcing me. The room was 4C.

The door was locked and my knock wasn’t answered. I did a little keyhole-peeping and I saw that the key was in the lock. The wood around the door was rotten. I lifted up on the knob and smacked the door with my shoulder. On the third try the door sagged open.

Lying on the bed was a man, his throat sliced neatly from ear to ear.

He was plenty dead. At the foot of the bed, only half unpacked, was a suitcase plastered with foreign labels. On the dresser was a passport made out to Michael Shanley. I gathered that he had just hit town from China. Small punctures on his arm told me he was a hophead.

I went out to the street and told the hackie to drop me off at my hotel.

When I went into the lobby, the telephone girl informed me that a man named Crell had been asking for me; that he had said that he would be back. The name didn’t mean anything. Then the telephone girl gave me a number to call. It was police headquarters and I got Big Munn on the end of the line.

“Find anything?” he asked me.

“No.”

His voice came back over the wire: “Just thought I’d let you know. We found a gold badge pinned to Purdy’s underwear.”

I might have expected Jud to be anything but that. I’d never have guessed he was a G-man.

**T**HE elevator hoisted me skyward. The trail seemed cold as an ice cube. Finding out that Jud was a government man didn’t help. Shanley might have helped—had I got to him sooner. The envelope was gone and I didn’t know where to look. And I hadn’t found out who had killed Jud—or why.

I tramped down the hall to my room and without thinking I pulled open the door. Then I got the feeling that something was wrong—the door should have been locked. Thinking this, I switched the light on.

All my clothes were piled in a heap on the floor. Pictures had been jerked down and the chairs slashed. Even the rugs had been ripped up.

I saw all this about the time I saw the little gray man smiling at me. He sat on the edge of a chair and he was smiling pleasantly. His hands were folded in his lap, and his gray hair was combed precisely back from his pale forehead.

Neither of us spoke immediately. I took my gun from my pocket and gave him a free look down the barrel. He didn’t say anything, I didn’t say anything. I was almost sore enough to shoot him then and there.

Then he held up a hand, palm toward me. “No need of that,” he said. His voice was neat and precise. His clothes were neat and precise. Everything about him was that way. “My name is Crell,” he went on. “I got impatient waiting in the lobby, so I took the liberty of coming up.”

I kept my gun on him and asked if he had also taken the liberty of tearing my place apart.

His mouth dimpled and he ignored the question. He continued:



“A man named Purdy was killed tonight. I believe—this is really only an assumption—I believe that he gave you something to keep for him.”

That hit me hard. The envelope again!

Crell sat with his knees precisely together. He hadn't moved since I'd come in the room. I asked him who he was and what was so important about the envelope.

In the first place, he told me, he was an opportunist. And in the second place—again if his assumptions were correct—the envelope contained directions for finding something which had a real value if put in the hands of the right man. The envelope, he said, probably contained about five green tickets.

“Five green tickets!” I said.

He nodded, sitting up a little straighter. “That was Shanley for you,” he said, smiling. “Purdy was to meet a man at *Dimitri's* tonight, a mythical man.”

I put two and two together and got four. Somebody had framed Jud. They had made an appointment with him, not really intending to keep it. That would get Jud where they could gun him out. He must have suspected something, and so he had given me the envelope to keep for him.

Then I remembered the marks on Shanley's arm, the passport, the foreign labels on his suitcase. Things began falling into place. It explained Jud's part in the affair, now that I knew he was a G-man.

“Dope!” I said.

Crell nodded. “Mike Shanley was a member of a gang which dealt in smuggled dope. It was his job to bring it into the country, where it was turned over to another man who would supply the peddlers. It was a very profitable business until Shanley got a touch of conscience and decided to square himself with his Maker and the law.”

This sounded reasonable, but it left a lot of things unexplained. “What about Bindler?” I asked.

Discarding the thought with a wave of his hand, Crell said that there was nothing to it. Bindler wasn't even in the racket. “Bindler's just a bum,” Crell told me. “The only office he ever had was his hat.”

I said: “Have it your own way. Who killed Purdy?”

“I want the envelope,” Crell said, ignoring me. “I think you have it. I'll give you two thousand dollars and the name of the man who killed Purdy in exchange for it.”

I TOLD him where he could go. The threads were being brought together fast, but there were still some loose ones. I forgot about Crell for a moment and I let my gun sag. When I looked up he had one pointed at my chest.

“Put your gun down,” he said in his precise voice. “I mean to have that envelope.”

He was standing over me now. He held the gun none too steadily, the way a man does who knows nothing about guns. I stood up and put my right hand in my pocket—and Crell's eyes unconsciously followed the movement. He didn't see my left until it exploded against his jaw.

I only had to hit him once. I dumped him on the sofa and went through his pockets. He didn't have two thousand dollars on him. Well, I didn't have the envelope either, but he didn't know that. I sat down and watched him until he came to.

“You didn't have to do that,” he said, when he sat up. “After all, I could have shot you.”

I said: “You haven't got two thousand dollars.” And then I said: “Who killed Purdy?” I shoved the nose of the gun hard in his ribs.

Crell shrugged. “You win. I am—was—the valet for a number of years of the man who—” He paused suddenly, peering over my shoulder. He even smiled a little.

I felt the presence of some one behind me. I started to turn. Crell said: "There is your man, Mr. Marble. Good evening, Mr. Kyle."

My hunch hadn't been so far off at that.

"There are guns on both of you," Kyle snarled. "You, Crell, you were a smart guy. Listening at keyholes, learning my business." He stood over Crell. "Hello wise guy," he said, and the gun in his hand went up and down, landing solidly on Crell's skull. Crell slumped down, his head bloody. He was still smiling. A funny little guy, I thought, a guy with guts.

Another man pushed a gun into my back. He was one of the hoods who had tried to get me in Dimitri's office. We went out and down to the street, Crell, who was unconscious, supported by Kyle.

A black sedan was parked at the curb and Kyle opened the door of it, motioning me inside. I held back a second.

"Wait a minute," I said, stalling for time. "I'll trade with you."

His grin was wolfish. He had me any way you wanted to look at it. He wouldn't find the envelope on me and I knew that I'd never convince him that I hadn't planted it somewhere. This ride was going to be just one way. Kyle hated my guts for kicking him out of my office, and besides it I knew too much now for him to let me live.

"Get in," he said.

I bent over, starting to climb into the back seat, and then something smacked me on top of the head and I went out cold.

A foot was kicking me in the face when I came to. It was Crell's. He was lying on the seat of the car, dead to the world, and one leg was hanging over the edge of the seat. I got his foot out of my face.

Marty Kyle and the other hood were sitting up front and talking about what they were going to do with us. They hadn't found the envelope and they were sore. What they were going to do to me wasn't very pretty.

I reached up and shook Crell's arm, but he didn't stir. That left me to do whatever was to be done alone. The car purred smoothly along at about thirty. At an intersection the car stopped and Marty Kyle twisted around to look at us. The other man was doing the driving. I played dead and Kyle only gave us a cursory glance. I guess he didn't expect trouble.

THE whole thing was clear now. Jud Purdy, a government man, had contacted Shanley, who was willing to talk. All Jud needed was the dope, and he'd have the goods on the whole mob. He's been lured to *Dimitri's* and he had probably picked up the blonde girl in order to avoid suspicion.

Probably somebody had simulated Shanley's voice to get him to go there. That left only Bindler, who still bothered me. I couldn't figure out what had happened to the envelope.

I tried to sit up and it was tough going. I got both hands around the fancy coat rack fastened to the back of the front seat and tried pulling myself up. The rope came loose in my hand and I fell back to the floor. I stayed there for a few seconds, trying to fight the pain in my head.

I felt about ready to give up. I had enough on Marty Kyle to send him up for life at least, and here I was lying on the floor of his car, utterly helpless. Enough rope, I thought dizzily, to hang him with.

And this gave me an idea. It's funny what a man will think and do when his life depends on it.

I got both elbows on the floor and levered myself up to a sitting position. Every time the car bounced I thought that my head was going to roll off. And what happened then isn't even very clear in my own mind. It happened too fast. Again I thought something about enough rope, and holding the ends of the coat rack I tossed the loop over the driver's head.

It settled around his neck and I jerked at the ends, my feet braced against the back of the front seat. I found out later that the driver almost had his head cut off. He let go of the wheel and clawed at his throat with both hands. Marty Kyle began chopping down at my unprotected head with his gun. I remember that some of the blows landed and some didn't, but that none seemed to hurt very much I because I was so full of pain already that a little more didn't matter.

The car drifted sideways and climbed the curb. I let go of the rope and managed to get the door open. Before I could get out there was a lot of noise and then the car hit the glass front of a store.

The last thing I remembered as I was thrown clear was that it had stopped snowing.

I opened my eyes in a hospital bed. I asked the nurse about it. She told me that both Crell and the driver were dead, but that Marty Kyle was luckier and was still alive, although he was cut up pretty badly. I didn't consider him very lucky.

After three months in the hospital they moved him to prison and finally convicted him on murder. He'd killed Jud himself. He swore that he hadn't killed Shanley, although that didn't matter much; you can only be hung once. The police never did establish Shanley's killer—it might have been Crell—but they didn't try very hard. Shanley was a wanted criminal.

Lying in bed, I had time to do a lot of thinking. I remembered what Crell had said about Bindler's office being in his hat. On a hunch I had Big Munn get hold of Bindler's hat for me.

"H'm. Take a look," I told him. The envelope was tucked away in the sweat-band of the hat, proving that Crell had been on the right track without knowing it. Big Munn thought that he should get something out of it, but I laughed at him. I couldn't see it that way.

The rest was the way I'd already figured, except that Dimitri hadn't had anything to do with it. He sent me a note and a bottle of his best whisky, which the night nurse and I killed together. I eventually collected his gambling debt, charging him only double what I would have charged anyone else; I still didn't like him.

When I got out of the hospital I dropped around to see the blonde, but she was gone. She'd gone back home, and that made me feel pretty good.

Which leaves only the envelope. By the time I got around to exchanging the five tickets at various checkrooms in the city, I had enough dope to stock a hophead's paradise. My percentage for turning it in as contraband to the U. S. Government ran into three figures.

That paid for the damage Crell had done to my room and then some.