

Detective Ed Travis had to cash in on bargain booty to keep his client from becoming a

Coffin Customer

By

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I TOOK one look at the guy who came through the door and got out of my chair fast. I carry a Colt .45 that has enough push behind it to stop a charging bull. I always say when a fellow needs a gun he needs it bad. This guy's face was pasty, distorted, his eyes bulging with a crazy expression. What made me draw was his right hand, stuck stiffly in the side pocket of his Chesterfield.

The Colt was out before he'd taken two steps and I squeezed the trigger at the same time. By all rights I should've scattered his brains over the room. His hand had come out of his pocket, empty, and it was easier

to jerk my aim than pull my trigger finger. The neat derby flew off his head as if snapped back by a string.

He stood motionless, gaping at me, his jaw hanging open against a bow tie. I saw then I'd misinterpreted the look in his eyes. They were glazed, terror-stricken. The guy was positively paralyzed with fear.

I said: "Brother, never walk into my office like that again, not unless you want to decorate a casket."

He gulped, working his mouth before the words came. "You—you too—" he whispered.

"Me too—what?"

He fell back a step and his knees were shaking like dice. He accused hoarsely: "You're in on it, Travis."

"Look, friend," I told him slowly, "I never saw you before and I don't know what you're talking about. People are always hiring some monkey to polish me off. The way you had your hand stuck in your pocket I thought sure—"

My office used to be part of a dentist's suite and the floor is covered with white linoleum. So of course the blood made little slapping sounds as it fell and stood out in stark crimson relief. It came from his hand, dripping off the limp fingers.

I got up, went around the desk and looked at it. Sunlight, bleak and diffused through the alley window, showed right through the palm. A brace and bit couldn't've drilled a cleaner hole. Nothing less than a .38 did that job.

I whistled. "How come?"

THE fear in his eyes blossomed. He said: "It started last night. Somebody's trying to kill me. First it was a car when I left the house. Then someone pushed me off the subway platform, but I just managed to crowd against the wall. A couple of minutes ago, on my way to see you, I reached for my derby to wipe the sweat band—and a bullet almost tore my hand off."

I went over to the door and locked it. The lad needed medication, but if I sent him out to a doctor I might never see him again—alive. Besides, one more attempt and he might check out just from heart failure. I pulled a silk handkerchief from his breast pocket and tied it around his hand.

I said: "Now stick that back in your pocket before you make this place look like a slaughter house. And I give me the story—short."

He did. Because there wasn't much to tell. His name was Leonard Gordon. He lived with and worked for his uncle, J. C.

Gordon, of Gordon, Hornday Co., the big-shot brokers. He was engaged to a girl named Sylvia Saint who sang in the Swing Club. His uncle liked her and they got along swell.

"What else?"

He opened his mouth and closed it. Something was on his mind. I cocked an inquiring eye at him and waited. His lips pressed down firmly. I got up, unlocked the door, held it wide, said:

"Lam, brother. Before I pitch you out of here. When I get mixed with a couple of gun-crazy stooges I like to know what I'm letting myself in for."

His eyeballs rolled up, he drooped slowly forward, then pitched off the chair in a dead faint. I relocked the door, went through his pockets and in his wallet found fifty bucks in small bills. But folded into one of the compartments was a single bill that made me tingle. Five thousand smackeroos. And that, gents, is not tin.

I appropriated it—for the time being.

When he came around, his first pleading words were: "Help me, Mr. Travis, please."

The guarantee for my fee was right in my pocket so I said, "Certainly," and pulled the phone across the desk and dialed headquarters. When I heard Sergeant Fargo's racking voice I said: "Sarge, Ed Travis talking. Send a prowler car over to my office. I got something hot for you."

Young Gordon watched me, still shaking like a guy with fever chills.

The two-way radio works fast and downstairs a siren was already moaning. I got up again, twisted the key in the door, went back to my desk and drew out an old unregistered .22. I laid it on top of the blotter. Then I pointed the Colt right at Gordon's heart.

Two cops burst in. They were both big and none too bright. I nodded to the red-faced one. "Here, McKeever. This nut barged in brandishing a rod. I had to shoot it

out of his hand. Book him for violation of the Sullivan Act.” I waved at the .22. “Take the evidence along with you.”

McKEEVER glowered. Gordon shrank back in his chair, eyeing me with horror. Suddenly he yanked out his wallet, pushed feverish fingers through it, and jumped up half across my desk, clutching wildly at my lapels.

“Give it back,” he screamed. “Give me back my money. You double-crossing—”

I slapped him into McKeever’s arms. “The guy’s nuts. Take him away. I’ll be down later to prefer charges. In the meantime, print him up and see if he’s got a record.”

McKeever collared him, the other cop grabbed his arm and together they dragged him out. I took out the five thousand dollar note and looked at it. That was a mistake.

“I’ll take it.”

It was a quiet voice. I looked up. I’d never seen the chap before and I wasn’t fooling with him. One of those things was in his hand, squat, businesslike, almost as big as my Colt, and he knew how to handle it. He was dressed in a form-fitting blue serge topcoat and his face was chiseled out of a piece of granite. I laid the bill on the desk and shrugged.

He said: “Roll it up and throw it over.”

I did so, squinting obliquely at my own gun with a longing look. His gun fingers tensed and I took my eyes off my gun fast.

“Well, Rock Face,” I said pleasantly, “we’ll consider this a loan. I want that money back some day.”

He answered without moving a muscle. “If you come for it better bring your pass book.”

I grinned humorlessly. He opened the door with his free hand, stepped back and was gone. By the time I had my gun in hand and reached the hallway, there was no sign of him. I looked at my watch. Six p. m.

All day nothing had happened and then suddenly things had begun to move fast. I liked it that way.

I went home, showered, donned a set of tails, had some dinner and cabbled over to the Swing Club. I went to the bar, downed a couple of Scotches, cased the place thoroughly, then beckoned to a waiter.

I asked him how to get to Sylvia Saint’s dressing room. He stretched on his tiptoes, craned his neck and crooked a finger at a tall, slender, immaculately clothed man with a clipped moustache and pale-gray eyes. The thin man drifted over. I repeated my question.

He smiled whitely. “She’s going on in a few moments.”

The band struck up a chord, lights dimmed, a bright spot flashed near the microphone, slid across to the stage door. She was standing there waiting for it. I leaned forward with my mouth parted. She was beautiful.

Tall, raven-wing black hair falling casquelike over her creamy shoulders, a milky complexion in which a generous, sultry mouth was a crimson splash. A low-cut dress of some green shiny material clung to her like a mold. She opened her lips and caught the music with a husky voice. Her diction—yes—there was something funny about her diction. And then I got it. South, deep south, maybe Georgia.

The customers ate it up. The boys glued their eyes to her over the rim of their glasses. When she was finished, spontaneous applause greeted her thunderously. Lights glared. I faced the thin man expectantly.

“You a friend of hers?” he asked.

“Yeah. From her home town, Cincinnati.”

He handed me a sharp, creased look. I was to find out why in a couple of minutes. Waving me to follow, he spun, threaded his

way across the dance floor, through an alley-like corridor to a closed door upon which he cracked his knuckles twice.

Sylvia Saint's voice said: "Come in."

She was sitting at the dressing table wiping off some makeup. She turned and smiled. "What is it, Earl?"

"Here's a fellow says he knows you from Cincinnati."

I gave a short laugh. "That was only a gag. I guess it was in Savannah I met you."

HER brows puckered; she seemed straining to remember. Up close there was nothing hard about her. She was soft, maybe even naive. She got up and stretched out her hand, and I was thinking how much breeding there was in the gesture when it happened. It caught me unprepared—off balance.

I went skidding half across the floor, the back of my ear smarting. Pain was still jogging through my head when I brought up against the wall. The thin man was standing over me, his jaw muscles bunched, his fists clenched. He'd caught me a beaut and I decided to take my time getting up.

He said to the girl: "Shall I toss him out, Sylvia?"

She shook her head. "Why, Earl, why did you do it? That's the fifth one in two weeks."

He said in a low voice: "You know damn well, Sylvia. This guy's just another one of those goons always on the make. I like Gordon; he's a clean kid, good for you. I don't want to see any of these mugs muscling in. I know what these guys are after and until you're safely married I'm keeping my eye on you."

By that time I was off the floor, shaking the cobwebs out of my head. I suppose I should've waded into him, but where would it get me? A half dozen waiters and bus boys would come on the run and I might be tempted to use artillery. I didn't want that.

Instead I reached for my wallet, thumbed through an assortment of cards, drew out one that read: *Ed Travis, Theatrical Agent*. I handed it to her and she handed it to him.

His eyes crawled over the top of it, fixed coldly upon me. "So what?"

I didn't answer him. I spoke to Sylvia Saint. "I've been very impressed with your work, Miss Saint. I might be able to book you into a Broadway show. If I might have just a moment alone I think—"

She cut in flatly: "Mr. King is my manager. You'll have to talk to him." She indicated the thin man.

"All right," I said, "I'll talk to him," and began rubbing my ear ruefully.

She suddenly gave a half smile, very apologetic, caught up some cleaning tissues and rubbed a streak of blood from my cheek bone. For a guy without too much weight, this King packed dynamite. Sylvia felt I had an explanation coming and she offered one.

"You see, Mr. Travis," she said, "back in Charleston where I was born I used to know Earl. He came back and opened a club down there. He discovered my talent. After my people died we were married. It didn't work out right and he took care of the divorce for me. But we stayed friends, didn't we, Earl, honey? I came up here, and then later Earl opened the Swing Club and let me work for him. He's a peach an' he's been takin' care of my affairs ever since."

That sounded fair enough. I grinned at King and he grinned back. I couldn't blame him for slugging me. In his position I'd've done the same. A dish like Sylvia Saint, innocent as all get-out, needs one hell of a lot of protecting along the Mazda route.

So right now I was in a spot. I wasn't any theatrical agent. I had no show to put her in. I didn't as a matter of fact know the first damn thing about it. I was fishing desperately about in my brain for an excuse to postpone our talk to some future date,

when Earl King himself pulled my coals out of the fire.

“Look, Travis,” he offered pleasantly, “Miss Saint’s about to be married. She’s got a chance to get into a nice family with a swell guy. A career would break things up. Leave her alone. Let her forget the stage. It’s a lousy life. I know and you know it. Give the kid a break.”

I grabbed at the opportunity. I held out my hand and he shook it. Sylvia was smiling, a funny brave little renunciatory smile. I left, thinking what a lucky guy Leonard Gordon was. I stood in front of the Swing Club counting up the results of my visit. They were all on the negative side. A split ear and still no chance to talk privately to Sylvia Saint.

I thought about the five thousand bucks and my face grew hot. What I needed was information. I let a cab run me down to the city prison, greased a couple of screws with some loose cash and got in to see Gordon.

When he made out who it was in the dimness of his cell, he grew rigid, his eyes burning like twin pools of flame. A certain amount of courage had seeped back into his veins. His mouth tucked into a lipless snarl. One hand had a tremendous white bandage on it and because I was looking at it I didn’t see him go into a crouch.

The whole thing only took a second. He came at me with a lunge, swinging both hands, choking little angry noises coming out of his throat. He couldn’t even think straight. Otherwise he’d never have used his bum wing in a fight. I tried to grab his arms, but he wormed away. I hated to do it, but there was no help for it.

Stepping in close, I buried my fist wrist deep into his belly. He stopped fighting. The starch flew out of him. So did the air with a soft *whoosh*. He folded like a marionette on cut strings.

THE gauze around his hand was turning red. I picked him up and dumped him onto the cot. The cell had a small sink in it. I balled a handkerchief under the water and squeezed some of it over his forehead. His eyes flickered and he moaned.

I said: “You can get hurt swinging at people like that, Gordon. Take it easy. I’m trying to help you.”

His mouth was tight. “Sure. That’s why you stole my five thousand dollars. That’s why you framed me into jail. I want to see a lawyer. I want to talk to my uncle. Damn you, Travis, I’ll kill you.”

He was right. Of course he was right. What else could he think? He’d come to me for help. So I’d helped myself to five grand. And for his trouble here he was in jail. There was only one possible way for him to see it—as the good old double-X.

“Listen to me, Gordon,” I said. “Wasn’t somebody trying to kill you? A car, the subway, a slug. Where would be a safer place for you than jail? Supposing they were after the five grand. If I took it away, then you wouldn’t have it. So maybe they’d leave you alone. Maybe they’d come after me. Then I could learn who was trying to make morgue bait out of you. Hell, brother, that’s simple as ABC. Just use your bean and figure it out. You’re no nitwit.”

His brow furrowed in deep thought. A slow light spread over his face. He separated his brows, looking sheepish.

“I—I never thought of that,” he admitted.

“Exactly. That’s why you hired me. Somebody was after the dough. Where’d you get it?”

He clammed up. I repeated the question, but he kept his lips locked.

“Okay,” I cracked irritably. “Deal me out. I’m through. Finished.” I got up. He reached his hand out and said in a pleading voice: “You can’t leave me like this, Travis.”

I pulled away. "I'm behind on my burial club dues and I'm not taking any chances."

"Then—then give me back my money."

I shook my head. "It's gone. Some monkey picked it off me right after the cops pulled you in."

He started up off the cot. "You're a liar! You—"

Of course he didn't believe that one either. Who would? "Nuts!" I interrupted. "You're lucky I took it away from you. You'd have put up a fight and ended with a punctured chest. No dough in this world is worth that. All right, you want to keep secrets. Play by yourself. So long, sucker."

I left the prison and headed for Fargo's office. Before I quit I felt I ought to straighten things out. No sense leaving the kid to rot in jail till the trial came up. I couldn't appear against him, not without perjuring myself. Besides, there was no sense in it.

Sergeant Fargo was big and swarthy, with a face the color of ripe beets and a temperament like boiling oil. He looked up from his desk with little black shoe-button eyes and chewed viciously on a cigar that might have been mildewed rope.

I told him I wanted Leonard Gordon released from jail.

Fargo let out a yelp. "What! That gun-crazy stooge. You must be crazy, Travis. He's liable to take a pop at you again. You know he can pick up another rod for three bucks at some pawnbroker's joint."

I lit a cigarette and got set for the explosion. I said: "It was all a gag, sarge. I was only kidding. He never took a shot at me."

Fargo blinked, narrowed his eyes. "Don't hand me that. You're up to one of your tricks again. You plugged him. You said so yourself. That hole in his hand wasn't made by no ice pick. Where'd he get that .22 from?"

I looked down coyly. "I planted it on

him. I wanted him out of my way for a while. I figured he'd be safe in jail."

Deep purple climbed up through the back of Fargo's neck. His little eyes locked with mine. He was sore as a gumboil.

"What the hell you think this is, Travis?" he growled. "A nursery? You think you can pop a guy into jail and take him right out by snapping your fingers. Nothin' doing."

I shrugged. There was no sense arguing with Fargo. He'd get over it, but right now he was stubborn and a tornado couldn't budge him. So while he kept screwing his face into a blacker frown I picked the phone off his desk and called Manny Zellman. Manny's worried little voice vibrated over the wires and I said:

"Listen, Manny, there's a guy in the Tombs by the name of Leonard Gordon on a Sullivan Act and malicious assault with intent to kill charge. Bail him out."

Manny spluttered. "The judge'll ask for maybe fifty grand."

"Raise it," I snapped, and hung up.

I knew he'd come through. I'd helped him more than once, and Manny was one bail bondsman who could raise security on real estate that wasn't even located on this earth.

FARGO rose. He was working hard to keep his voice down. "If that guy gets into any trouble, I'll hold you responsible, Travis. I'll pull you in as an accomplice. I'll have your license. You'll be digging ditches on the W. P. A. Now get the hell outta here."

I was glad to. It was too damn hot in there. I slipped into a diner, killed a steak, then went home and hit the sheets. In ten minutes I was fast asleep.

I don't know what time it was when they woke me. And I never had a chance to find out. The bell was ringing and when I opened the door, McKeever pushed his

bulky uniformed figure into the room. I had to take a second look to make sure I was seeing straight. McKeever had his police positive in his fist and he looked like the business.

His sidekick came in right behind him and he slapped a pair of handcuffs around my wrists. I said: "What's it all about, McKeever?"

He looked glum. "You'll find out. Come on."

I dressed and we went downstairs and got into a prowl car. But we did not head toward police headquarters.

Instead, we slid crosstown over to Madison Avenue and came to a stop before the Hotel Roean. The Hotel Roean is a classy joint and it costs considerable lettuce to live there. The elevator took us up to the twentieth floor.

A cop stood on guard outside a door. We went in. They were all there: Lieutenant Reirton, of Homicide, Sergeant Fargo, the assistant medical examiner, a couple of print boys, photographers—and my recent client, Leonard Gordon.

If it was possible for Gordon to look worse than when he first came into my office, he did right then. His face was white and drawn, his arms hung limply at his sides, his eyes were unbelievably haggard.

I didn't know what I was in for, but I was certain it was something serious—damn serious. In all that room there was only one man I could count on in a pinch. Lieutenant Reirton. I'd given him some tips on a couple of tight cases.

I said: "Well, gentlemen, what's the party for?"

Fargo ground out: "I warned you, Travis. I knew this Gordon was a killer." He pointed to an open door and I saw the corner of a bed. "Just go in there and take a look. Take a look and pat yourself on the back. Your cheap little tricks are paying off. You wanted Gordon out of jail. Well, he's

out. But he's goin' back in for another short stay, just long enough to turn black in the chair."

I didn't say a word. My heart was bumping hard inside my chest. I swept a look around the room, then sidled to the open door. I stood there for perhaps twenty seconds staring at her. I felt sick.

She wasn't beautiful any more, Sylvia Saint wasn't. Her face was marred by two ugly red-lipped holes. One in the forehead, the other just through the side of her mouth. It was open but there weren't any teeth showing.

I turned away, ignoring everyone but Reirton. "What happened, lieutenant?"

Reirton was always civil. He must have seen how badly I felt. I kept wetting my lips. The palms of my hands were moist.

He said: "Somebody heard two shots and called the manager. When they broke in they found Gordon leaning over Miss Saint. The gun was on the floor. He says—"

Gordon croaked: "Listen to me! I didn't do it. I swear I didn't. I just carried her to the bed. We were sitting in the living room. I don't know where the shots came from. I never touched the gun. Somebody threw it on the floor. They musta been standing on the terrace. You gotta believe me, you gotta. . . ." He broke off and started bawling.

I shook my head. "He didn't do it, Reirton."

"How do you know?" Reirton's voice was impatient. "Were you here?"

Fargo snorted. "He's everywhere."

I said: "Somebody's been trying to kill this guy for a couple of days. That's why he came to see me in the first place. Those bullets were meant for him, not for Miss Saint. Whoever did it just had lousy aim, that's all."

Reirton shrugged. "This thing belongs to the D. A. now. It's out of my hands. If he doesn't get a first-degree murder conviction you can have my stripes."

“But look, man!” I exploded. “I’ll bet Gordon’s prints aren’t even on that gun.”

REIRDON showed his palms. “So what? Fingerprints on guns is story book stuff. Out of all the murder cases in history there hasn’t been one single one in which prints on the butt of a firearm was the decisive factor in getting a conviction.”

Fargo shoved his big face close to mine. He was a good cop. He hated to see the law broken. And right now he was holding me responsible.

“You’re just as guilty, Travis. I’m not taking any chances with you. That’s why I ordered McKeever to put the cuffs on.”

Reirdon held out his hand. He wanted the story. I gave it to him. How I’d had Gordon locked up for safe-keeping and then got him out when I quit the case because I felt it a duty. Reirdon understood. He had McKeever unlock the bracelets.

And that was that. They took young Gordon down to book him and I stood in the street, looking up at the twentieth floor, feeling lousy. And helpless. There was nothing could be done until morning. So I spent the next couple of hours pounding the pavements.

They let me in to see young Gordon. He was a sight. He hadn’t slept all night. He’d been through hell with the cops, but they hadn’t broken him. He wouldn’t confess. He sat on his stool muttering to himself. He looked up at me, his mouth working.

“You were right,” he said in a hoarse whisper. “I should’ve told you everything. If they’d only gotten me instead of her. She was so young, Travis, you didn’t know her, so young. . . .”

I gripped his shoulder. “That’s over. The sooner you get used to the idea, the better. There’re two things to think about now. How to get you out of this mess, and how to find the guy who actually killed her. Better

tell me about the five grand; where did you get it?”

He spoke automatically, not thinking about the words. “Hornday, my uncle’s partner, Gordon, Hornday Company . . . I caught him fixing the books, embezzling. I promised I wouldn’t tell. He gave me the money—”

I didn’t wait for more. I knew all I had to. All right, so young Gordon was a blackmailer. But he wasn’t a killer. And a five thousand dollar offer can turn any young guy’s head.

All the way down to Wall Street in a cab I kept figuring the angles. And I thought I had it straight. The offices of Gordon, Hornday Co. were not too imposing. They were a small brokerage outfit. And when I barged through the doors hell was to pay.

A thin old man was hobbling around, waving a stick. A couple of accountants were working furiously over a pile of ledgers. A scrawny old maid sat slumped dejectedly in a corner. Nobody paid any attention to me. I went over to the old maid and asked what was up. A couple of tears bubbled in her colorless eyes.

“The firm is going out of business,” she said in a tired voice. “We’re bankrupt. Mr. Gordon came out of his sick bed today. He’s closing up.”

“Where’s Hornday?”

At the mention of the name her shoulders began heaving and bobbing, and new tears welled out of her eyes. Finally she caught her breath. “He’s run away. That’s why we’re going out of business. Mr. Hornday’s been stealing our client’s securities.”

“Where’s his office?”

She pointed to a door. I went inside, let my eyes scuttle over the room. I didn’t know what the dickens I was looking for, but there didn’t seem to be anything else to do. There was somebody else in that room. I

sensed it. Constantly being in danger like I am gives one a sort of sixth sense.

I got out my Colt and released the safety lock. I moved sideways, out of the line of the closet door. I reached over and twisted the knob. It was locked.

I own a master key that cost me half a century and will open pretty nearly anything. This door was a cinch. It swung open. I'd been right. Somebody else was in the room. He came at me and I barely managed to hop out of the way.

It was Rock Face, the guy who'd taken the five G's.

HE FELL forward and hit the floor with a soft thump. I turned him over. He was dead. The haft of a steel letter opener stuck out of his back. His face was screwed up in pain. I've seen lots of stiffes and I could tell right away this chap had never fired the shots that killed Sylvia Saint.

He'd been dead a lot more than twenty-four hours and I didn't need the M. E. to corroborate me.

I beat it back to the outer office and asked the old maid when Hornday had disappeared.

"He took the morning plane yesterday to Miami," she said. "I bought the tickets."

I stood stock-still and stared at her. Hornday couldn't possibly have killed Miss Saint. The plane to Miami and then the clipper to Cuba and out of the country. He'd hired Rock Face to get rid of young Gordon. The gunman had taken his cue from the boy and tried a little blackmail himself. Hornday was sick and tired of the whole thing, so he slipped the shiv into Rock Face's back and lit out.

But neither of them could possibly have killed the girl. I wallowed around in a morass of thoughts for a moment. Suddenly I snapped my fingers. I could have kicked myself to the moon. I needed the answer to only one question. I didn't think I could get

it from Gordon. Earl King was the man who could give it to me.

King was in his office in the Swing Club going over last night's accounts. He was not surprised to see me. The newspapers had mentioned my name. His mouth was taut. Sylvia Saint's death had hit him hard too.

I said: "There's one question I want to ask, King?"

He ran his gray eyes over me, stopping a second at the slight bulge made by my holster. "Go ahead."

"Miss Saint, what kind of family did she come from?"

He pursed his lips. "What do you mean?"

"How were they fixed, financially?"

He was silent a shade too long. He shrugged.

I said: "They left her a lot of money, didn't they?"

"I presume so," he admitted in a low voice.

"You knew that all along, didn't you?"

He started walking around the room. I pivoted slowly, keeping my eyes on him. He'd caught me unawares once. I didn't intend to have it happen again. He was half concealed by a cabinet now, from the center of his vest down.

"Look, Travis," he said, "I know what you're thinking. You're wrong and I can prove it. Let me show—"

And then he started firing.

He'd slipped his hand into his pocket and I hadn't seen it. The smoke puffed through the material and curled slowly upward. I saw all that as I went down. The pain along my ribs was bad. But not so bad that I couldn't get my gun out.

He'd hopped from in front of the cabinet and was poised over me, aiming down, when I fired. I fired three times, keeping the shots spaced around his chest. I couldn't take any chances.

Earl King was dead before he hit the

floor. He was stone dead and the only thing moving about him was a drop of blood percolating from his mouth. I tried to move but I couldn't. A couple of waiters rushed into the room. I motioned with my gun and they called Reirdon on the phone.

It doesn't take a cop long to get from one place to another in the city, and he wouldn't let me open my yap till he was seated beside me in an ambulance.

"It was this way," I told him, "Miss Saint was worth a pile of money. She'd been married a year or so ago to King. She wasn't too bright and she thought he'd really gotten her a divorce before they came up North. He didn't want to free her. He wanted to inherit her money.

"When it looked like she was really going to marry young Gordon, King got scared the whole thing might come out. So he had to kill the girl."

Reirdon gnawed on his bristled mustache. "How did you know they weren't divorced?"

I smiled wanly, then winced as a streak of pain slid through my ribs. "I read about it in a book of funny laws the other day. Miss Saint came from Charleston. That's in South Carolina. And South Carolina is the only state in the union that doesn't have any divorce laws at all. A marriage in that state is supposed to stick."

Reirdon nodded. "Well, that lets Gordon out. But I don't suppose he'll feel so hot about it, losing his fiancé."

Reirdon was right. I didn't tell him about the blackmail. I knew how I felt about Miss Saint's death and I figured young Gordon had been punished enough.

