

# Detective T.N.T.

*"Baby-Face Gregg" Story*



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*Baby-faced Ned Gregg, the toughest private detective on two feet,  
wore a cadet's natty uniform to play kid brother to an heiress.*

**N**ED GREGG got out of the taxi in front of the Balbo Grille, and wriggled uncomfortably in his rented uniform. It was too tight around the shoulders, and too loose around the hips. Besides, the collar was stifling him. He waited impatiently while Mike Schulz paid off the driver.

Mike was uncomfortable, too. He was wearing a tuxedo, and he didn't like it. Also, he wasn't quite sure about what was going to happen.

"Listen, Boss," he said, after he had got rid of the cab. "This setup sounds screwy to me. Why would the dame want you to pass yourself off as her brother from the Hudson Military Academy?"

"How do I know?" Ned said irritably. "All I know is what she told me on the phone. For five grand I'd pass myself off as a spotted leopard."

"Yeah," grunted Mike. "You can't fool me. We got plenty of dough left from that Leona Flemming case. We don't need the

five grand. It's just that you're a born nose-poker."

"Nose-poker? What's that?"

"You gotta poke your nose in trouble. When you smell trouble, you go for it. This dame calls up and says she'll give you five grand if you'll get hold of a military academy uniform and go to Balbo's joint tonight and say you're a kid named David Snow. You never heard of her, did you?"

"No."

"You're not even sure you'll get the five grand, are you?"

"No."

"But the dame said she was in a jam."

"Yes."

"Well," Mike said sourly, "nobody but a sucker would bite! And you're the sucker!"

Ned Gregg glanced at Mike Schultz out of the corner of his eye. "Well, Mike, maybe you're right. Maybe we shouldn't bother. As you say, we have enough dough to last us for a while. Let's forget it. Grab a cab and we'll go home and get out of these monkey suits—"

"Now, wait," Mike Schultz said hurriedly. "Suppose this dame is really in a jam—"

"Okay, Mike." Ned patted him on the shoulder. "You're a dope, too. Now let's go in. And remember, I'm Cadet David Snow, from Hudson Military Academy, and you're Captain Lambert, the Academy's Instructor in Physical Education."

He pushed in through the door of Balbo's Grille, with Mike close at his heels.

"Do me one favor, Boss," Mike pleaded as they entered the smoke-laden place. "Hold on to your temper. If anyone calls you Baby-face, don't go off like a comet. You paid four fines in night court last month for socking guys that called you Baby-face."

"It was worth it," Ned growled. "And as long as I have the dough, I'll pay for socking any other lug who tries it."

"I can see where we have fun tonight!" Mike Schultz said lugubriously.

He had hardly said it, before the fun commenced.

A TALL girl with reddish hair and the most kissable lips west of the Hudson River got up from one of the tables and came hurrying over, her eyes fixed on Ned.

"David!" she exclaimed. "Brother David. My dear baby brother!"

And she threw her arms around his neck.

"Play up!" she snapped, with her lips at his ear. "I'm the girl who phoned you—Martha Snow. You're my brother, David."

"So I gather," Ned said. "This will be a pleasure. I never realized what I was missing—not having a sister of my own." Over his shoulder he said to Mike Schultz: "Remind me to get a sister like this one tomorrow, Mike."

The girl's arms were cool and smooth against his cheek, and the perfume of her hair was in his nostrils. He looked down into her eyes.

"Did you say you were going to pay me for this?"

"Don't stand there like a dope!" she whispered. "You're my brother. You haven't seen me for two years. Lay off the wisecracks, and act like an innocent kid that's glad to see his sister. You're Baby-face Gregg, aren't you? Well—act the part!"

"And how!" Ned said happily. He put both his arms around her waist, lifted her off the floor, and kissed her. He held her so tight, she could hardly breathe, and he kissed her so hard that she gasped.

"Gee, it's wonderful to see you again, Sis!" he boomed. "You're looking swell!" And he kissed her again, holding her even tighter, with her feet a good five inches off the floor.

She wrenched her lips away from his. "Let go of me, damn you! I told you to act like a kid brother—not like a wolf."

"You're right, Sis!" Ned boomed. "It's two years since I've seen you. And you're

prettier than ever!”

He kissed her again.

She ground her teeth in exasperation. “If you don’t let go of me, I’ll kick you in the shins!”

“Okay, Sis!” Ned said. “You win.”

He let her down. She stood glaring at him for a minute, and trying to catch her breath. Then she straightened her dress, and smoothed her hair.

“Before the evening is over, Mr. Ned Gregg,” she said viciously, “I’m going to give you such a kick in the shins that you’ll scream. I’d do it now, only I need your help. Now come on over to the table. See that man and woman I’m sitting with? They’re my keepers.”

“Keepers?”

“You heard me. In case you don’t know it, I’m insane.”

“Excuse me,” said Ned. He turned to Mike. “Did you hear what I heard?”

Mike nodded sadly. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Who’s your gorilla friend?” Martha Snow asked.

Ned grinned. “Excuse me. Miss Snow, this is Captain Lambert, the—er—physical instructor at Hudson Military Academy. In reality, he’s my assistant, Mike Schultz. A good man with his fists, in case of trouble. He once went six rounds with Jack Dempsey.”

“Glad to meet you, miss,” Mike said sourly. “I’m crazy, too.”

Martha Snow glowered at him. “Don’t be a wise guy. Follow me. And try to act your part. These people are no fools. If you make a mistake, they’ll catch on to you. Then it’ll be curtains for all of us.”

“What’s the play?” Ned asked, as she took each of them by an arm and led them across the floor to the table.

“I can’t tell you now,” she said. “Just follow my lead. I’ll try to explain, the first chance I get. There’s only one thing you’ve

got to remember—*don’t leave me out of your sight.*”

She looked up at Ned, and he saw that there was terror in her eyes. “My life depends on it. You must be sure that you or Mike are with me every minute!”

“Till when?” Ned asked.

She shrugged. “Till I tell you I’m safe.”

He was about to ask another question, but he couldn’t for they had reached her table.

A MAN and woman were sitting there. The woman was solidly built, chunky like a man, with a pair of hard and brittle eyes. The man was a big brute of a fellow, with a beetle-head that seemed to grow right out of his shoulders without benefit of a neck. They had been watching Martha Snow like a pair of vultures, all the time that she had been talking with Ned and Mike.

The man did not get up when Martha introduced them.

“This is Mrs. Titus. She’s a matron at the Hillville Asylum. And this is Oscar Hamm. He’s a guard at the asylum.”

Ned involuntarily threw a glance at Mike Schultz. Mike returned the glance, just as puzzled. They had thought it was a gag she had pulled—about being insane. But now it looked as if she was in a fair way to prove her claim to insanity.

Oscar Hamm’s small eyes sized Ned Gregg up. His lips twisted in a derisive grin. “So you’re her kid brother, eh? ‘T’s a nice uniform you got there, kid. You gonna be a soldier when you grow up? I didn’t know they fed you milk in the army.”

Now, the one thing Ned Gregg couldn’t take was kidding about his youthful appearance. He was two hundred and ten pounds of well-distributed bone and muscle, and he packed a wallop that was the mathematical equivalent of a half-ton piledriver. But it was his misfortune to have been blessed with a countenance that could

be described as nothing if not cherubic. That face of his had all the blue-eyed innocence of a youngster.

Ned Gregg leaned over the table, and began to talk in a low voice, which was barely audible above the low strains of the orchestra. He told Oscar Hamm precisely what he thought of him and his ancestors.

Gregg had spoken so low that neither Mrs. Titus nor Martha had heard his actual words. But there was no mistaking from his manner. Martha Snow put a hand to her throat, and watched in breathless panic for what Oscar would do. Mrs. Titus, the tough matron, pursed her lips in wonder. Mike Schultz groaned.

As for Oscar Hamm, he was speechless for a second. Then his mouth twisted viciously, and his small eyes gleamed with sharp anticipation of what he was going to do to this fresh kid. He pushed his chunky, powerful body up from the chair.

"So you're lookin' for trouble, eh, kid?"

Ned Gregg started around the table for him.

**M**IKE SCHULTZ opened his mouth to speak. He was going to say, "Take it easy, Boss!" but he abruptly remembered the roles they were both playing. He was supposed to be an instructor in the academy. So instead, he mustered his best authoritative voice, and barked crisply: "Cadet Snow! *Tenshun!*"

Ned Gregg stopped short. Mike's crisp reminder caught him up. He remembered he wasn't here to pick fights, but to help Martha Snow.

"All right, Captain Lambert," he said. "I'm sorry. But tell that Hamm he better lay off me!"

"Well," said Martha Snow, "it looks like I'm not the only one around here that's nuts!"

"You're right!" Oscar Hamm grunted. "If this fresh kid brother of yours wants

trouble, he come to the right place!"

Mrs. Titus looked sour. "Sit down, everybody!" she said. "We haven't got much time." She looked at Martha. "You said you wanted a chance to see your brother before you went away. All right. Oscar and I are letting you see him. You got twenty minutes, is all. Then we got to make the train."

"For the asylum," said Oscar Hamm. "She's been officially committed to the Hillville Asylum. We got a court order." He said it truculently, as if waiting for Ned to make something of it.

"Please let me talk to my brother alone," Martha Snow said.

Mrs. Titus shook her head. "We ain't leavin' you, miss. Whatever you want to say to him, you say it here."

Ned grinned, and got up. "Come on, Sis," he said. "Let's go."

Oscar Hamm jumped up, and reached across the table. He grabbed Ned's uniform jacket with one hand, and smashed at Ned's face with his right fist.

Ned just moved his head a bit to the right, and ducked the blow. Then he drove his own right, square into Hamm's nose.

The big asylum guard went toppling backward, chair and all, his grip on Ned's coat broken. Also, his nose.

Mrs. Titus did not move from her seat. Her stolid face did not change expression. But she brought her hand up from under the table, and in it was a small nickel-plated automatic pistol. She expertly slipped off the safety catch and pointed the gun at Ned.

"Oscar told you we was taking the girl to the asylum, by the order of the court. We got the law on our side. You busted Oscar's nose, an' he'll take that up with you in due time. Right now, you better not try to take your sister out of here. Because, as I say, we got the law with us. If you don't sit down, I'll shoot you right straight in the middle of that pretty face of yours."

But she hadn't counted on Mike Schultz.

Mike, standing alongside Ned Gregg, moved inconspicuously. He got both hands on the edge of the table, said, "Here goes, Boss!" and pushed the whole thing, table, cloth, glasses and all, right over into Mrs. Titus's lap.

"Nice work, Mike," said Ned Gregg. He reached down and picked up the pistol, which had gone flying from the matron's hand. She was red-faced with anger and chagrin, desperately trying to disentangle herself from the table, the tablecloth and the various assortment of glasses and cutlery in her lap. Oscar Hamm was lying stretched out on the floor, absolutely motionless, with his nose and mouth a beautiful shade of red.

THE orchestra had stopped playing, and all the patrons were staring, getting a big kick out of the whole thing, but no one offering to interfere. Two waiters were hurrying over from different directions, and the bartender was coming around from behind the bar, with a whisky bottle clubbed in one hand, and an iron lemon-juice extractor in the other.

Ned Gregg saw the trouble closing in, and his eyes lit up. But his baby-face remained as innocuous as ever.

"Ah!" he said. "Let's get these monkeys."

"Nix, Boss!" Mike Schultz begged, grabbing his arm. "Remember the dame. We got to get her out of here. Come on. You can fight palookas like these six days a week—when we haven't got a dame to clutter up the works."

"All right," Ned said reluctantly. He picked up the table from Mrs. Titus' lap, and raised it effortlessly in the air with both hands, above his head. Then he flung it at the advancing bouncers.

The edge of the table caught the bartender in the stomach and doubled him over, carrying him backward into the waiters. They all fell in a tangled mass.

Ned took Martha Snow by the arm and piloted her to the door. Mike Schultz backed out after them, keeping the nickel-plated pistol ready. But nobody evinced any further desire to stop them.

Out in the street, Ned stopped for a minute, looking around for a cab.

Martha Snow said bitterly: "Well, I must say, you've fixed me up fine!"

"What are you squawking about?" Ned demanded. "Didn't we get you out of being taken to a nut house?"

"Sure. But now I'll be a fugitive. Oscar Hamm told you the truth. He has a court order to take me to Hillville Asylum. Now he'll notify the police that I've escaped, and they'll hunt me—like a criminal. I was hoping you'd be able to do something clever. I bribed them to take me here for a last chance to see the world before they put me away. And then I said I'd go quietly, provided they let me say good-by to my brother. That was a trick to get you in there. But now you've spoiled everything."

"Oh, hell!" said Ned. "This is too much for me. I don't get it at all. What do you want to do—go back in there and let them take you away?"

She shivered. "Not now. Hamm and that terrible woman would probably beat me, to get even for what you did to them. Better get me away."

A cab which had been parked down at the corner had pulled up at Ned's wave. Mike Schultz came running out to join them, grinning. "I put the fear of the devil in those bozos, with this pistol. But they'll be after us in a minute!"

Ned nodded. He handed Martha Snow into the cab, pushed Mike in, then climbed in himself. The cab started off, without a word of direction.

And it was only then, after he had fallen into the seat alongside Martha, that he saw that the cab was already occupied.

The man was sitting straddle-legged,

facing backward, in one of the folding seats. He was a thin man with a carefully waxed mustache. He was smiling with a great degree of satisfaction.

"Introduce me to your brother and his friend, my dear," he said to Martha.

Martha Snow was staring at him with the fascinated gaze of a victim who is being hypnotized by a cobra.

"You—Doctor Shoemaker! How did you find me?"

"Very easy, my dear. Oscar Hamm told me you had bribed him and Mrs. Titus to take you to Balbo's to meet your brother. So I just thought I'd keep a watch over you."

There was a strange listlessness in Martha Snow. She seemed suddenly devoid of all hope.

**D**OCTOR SHOEMAKER smiled very charmingly at Ned. "So you are young David Snow, eh? And this?" He nodded at Mike Schultz.

"This is Captain Lambert," Ned said. "How do you fit in this picture, doc?"

Martha Snow suddenly raised her head. "He's a devil!" she blurted. "He tricked me into acting crazy, so I'd be committed to the Hillville Asylum. It's his place."

"He tricked you into acting *crazy*?" Ned asked.

Martha hurried on, the words bubbling from her with impassioned vehemence. "He, and a lawyer named Brant. Brant was the lawyer who handled father's estate. The will divided two million dollars between myself and my bro—and you, David. Brant got me to sign some papers without reading them, and I discovered later that they were contracts to buy worthless land in Idaho—for five hundred thousand dollars. I went to Doctor Shoemaker, and he told me of a way to break the contracts—that if I acted crazy, I could claim I hadn't been in my right mind when I signed them. So, on this devil's advice, I went around doing nutty things.

Shoemaker is a brain specialist, and he knows just what to tell me to do in order to convince the alienists. I did such a good job that I was declared insane, and committed to Hillville Asylum!"

"Hmm," said Ned, in his soft, drawling voice, which was just as deceptive as his baby-face. "Did you do that, Doctor Shoemaker?"

The suave doctor shrugged. "That is her story now."

"And now," Martha went on, "he plans to get me in his power in that asylum, and take the whole estate away from me. It's true. He's working with that lawyer, Brant!"

"How do you know that?" Shoemaker demanded, his eyes flickering.

"I heard you! I overheard you and Brant, talking about it, yesterday. It was in your own office. You thought I was at the other end of the suite, in one of the consulting rooms. But I was next door. I heard everything. I would have run away, but it was too late. I'd already been adjudged insane, and you had Oscar Hamm and Mrs. Titus keeping watch in the office. I couldn't have got out. So today, on the way to the train, I offered them five thousand dollars if they'd let me phone my brother to meet me at Balbo's. I had some money in my personal account at the bank, and I gave them a check."

The cab had swung north while they had talked, and Ned, peering out the window, noted that they were heading along the Saw Mill River Parkway, into the suburbs.

"Where are you taking us now, Doc?" he asked mildly.

Shoemaker smiled. "In pursuance of the court order, I am taking Miss Snow to the Hillville Asylum. Of course, if you wish to prevent this by force, that is your privilege. I am not a man of violence. But I warn you that all the majesty of the law will bear down upon you. I suggest that you come along to the asylum, and we can talk things over

quietly. I am sure that we can find a way out, through peaceful discussion.”

“Hmm,” said Ned Gregg. At a nudge from Mike Schultz, he glanced out through the rear window, and noted that another car was following them, a short distance behind. That would be Mrs. Titus, no doubt, and maybe Oscar Hamm—if he had been able to regain consciousness.

“All right,” Ned said. “We’ll go to the asylum with you. But you better think hard, doc. You better think of a way out for my sister. Otherwise, I’m going to make trouble.”

Shoemaker smiled again. “I think I already have an idea. But let’s wait till we get there. Shall we?”

NED glanced at Martha Snow. She was white, and tense. Her hand stole out and touched his, as if she were seeking moral encouragement. He pressed her hand.

“I think this’ll work out okay, Martha,” he whispered.

In a few minutes, the cab swung off the parkway into a narrow side road, then turned off once more, on a dirt lane which led to the asylum. They slowed up and swung into a gravel driveway in front of a pleasant, low brick building which might have passed for a suburban home, except for one thing—the iron bars on all the windows.

“Here we are!” Dr. Shoemaker said heartily. “This is Hillville Asylum. Not a bad place at that, eh? I assure you it’s quite comfortable.”

“Yeah,” said Ned Gregg. “So is a plush-lined coffin!”

Martha Snow looked at the building, and shuddered. “No one would suspect that people are confined in there—against their wills!”

Doctor Shoemaker shrugged. “The people who are confined here are a menace to society.”

“Like Martha?” Ned asked softly. “Would you say *she* is a menace to society?”

Shoemaker passed that one up. “I suggest,” he said, “that we three go inside and talk the matter over—you, Miss Snow, your brother and myself. Captain Lambert can remain out here in the cab.” He looked meaningfully at Mike Schultz. “You see, this is more or less a family matter.”

Mike Schultz was about to protest, but Ned Gregg gave him the high sign, and said: “Quite so, doctor. I’m sure Captain Lambert will excuse us.”

“Sure, sure,” Mike said, reluctantly. “I’ll wait down here.”

The taxicab driver had come around to the side, and was holding the door open for them. He was a thick-set, husky chap, built more like a waterfront tough than like a hack-pusher.

As Doctor Shoemaker stepped out, he whispered something in the driver’s ear. The fellow glanced at Mike Schultz, and nodded.

Ned and Mike both saw that glance. Ned Gregg nudged Mike, and Mike grinned happily.

Martha Snow waited listlessly at the entrance. She seemed to have had all the fight taken out of her. It was as if the prospect of entering that building meant the end of life for her.

Ned Gregg glanced down the road, and caught a glimpse of the car which had followed them out of the city. It was driving without lights, and moving slowly, as if waiting for them to enter before pulling up. Ned glanced quickly away, and turned his innocent eyes on Doctor Shoemaker.

“I hope you have a good idea worked out, doc.”

“Oh, sure, sure!” the doctor said with false heartiness. “Just you come inside with me, and I’ll explain it.”

He led them to the door, and rang the bell.

A male nurse opened the door for them.

"This way, my children," said Shoemaker.

THEY went down a short hall, and entered a large, well-furnished sitting room. It was exceptionally large, more like the lobby of a hotel. There were easy chairs, several tables with magazines and books, a radio and a phonograph. But Ned's eyes narrowed as he noted that every bit of furniture was securely fastened to the floor, and that all the windows were barred from the outside.

Half a dozen men and two women were sitting around in the room, some reading, some playing checkers or cards. These people looked normal at first glance, but a closer scrutiny revealed that their eyes were unnaturally bright, their movements exceptionally jerky and nervous.

When Doctor Shoemaker appeared in the room, everyone immediately became silent, their bodies stiffening as if at the crack of a master's whip.

A small man with tiny, ferretlike eyes and a pointy nose sprang up from one of the tables and came hurrying over to Shoemaker, with a cunning grin. He only spared a fleeting glance for Ned Gregg and Martha Snow, and spoke to the doctor.

"I've done it!" he shouted, brandishing a strip of cardboard which had been cut into the shape of a curved dagger, with a long blade and a vicious point. "I've at last succeeded in fashioning the same kind of dagger I used on Luigi Petronelli! All I need to do is to have this made by an armorer, and I'll be able to use it again! What fun! I can kill so easily with this. See how it curves? A single thrust into the back, between the shoulder blades, and the point will pierce the heart!"

"That's fine!" said Doctor Shoemaker. He turned to Ned and Martha, and smiled crookedly. "Allow me to introduce my friend Cesar Borgia!"

Ned raised his eyebrows. "Cesar Borgia? I thought he was dead about five hundred years!"

The little man turned a murderous glance at Ned. "That's what they all say! They all say I'm dead. But they're mad. I ruled Italy with an iron hand. I conquered Piedmont and Genoa, and I put hundreds of my enemies to death. But *I* never died. I came to America before Christopher Columbus, and I've lived here ever since. None of you believe me, except Doctor Shoemaker. *He* knows, because he used to be my court physician. He's changed his name now, but he's still faithful to Cesar Borgia!"

"Ah!" said Ned. "I see. You're sure you're not Napoleon Bonaparte?"

"Of course not!" the little madman snapped. "There's Napoleon Bonaparte!"

He pointed to a man who was playing cards at one of the tables. "See him? He's playing with Czar Alexander of Russia, Cleopatra, and Hanoverius the Third. The lady opposite his—his partner—is Cleopatra, of course. The man at his right is Alexander, and the one at his left is Hanoverius the Third, Emperor of Hircania."

Ned Gregg raised his eyebrows. "Hanoverius the Third, did you say?"

"Of course. Emperor of Hircania."

"I never heard of Hanoverius the Third, or of a country called Hircania."

The little madman cackled scornfully. "That's because you're ignorant. You're like all the rest of them. You've learned the history of the past, but you never learned the history of the *future!*"

"What do you mean by that?" Ned asked.

The little Cesar Borgia waved his cardboard dagger impatiently. "Hanoverius the Third hasn't been born yet. He's not due to conquer the world for another two hundred years. In the mean time, he's spending his time here. When his great moment arrives, he will take his place in history alongside of Napoleon, Alexander

and—myself. He belongs to the history of the *future!*”

Doctor Shoemaker smiled, and patted Cesar Borgia on the shoulder. “If you will excuse us, Your Excellency, I must take my guests into my office. We will see you later—”

“Take your hand from my shoulder, vile slave!” Cesar Borgia shouted. “Have you no respect for your master?”

“I am very sorry, Most Illustrious,” Doctor Shoemaker said. “It shall not happen again.” He took his hand from the little man’s shoulder, and turned to Martha. “Follow me, please!”

Martha Snow shuddered. “M-must I spend my life with these madmen?” Ned pressed her arm. “Not if I can help it, Baby. Let’s go.”

They followed Shoemaker out of the room, and along another hall, with the male nurse close behind them. The doctor led them up a flight of stairs to his office.

“Remain out here in the hall, Rugg,” he ordered the male nurse. “Let no one enter.”

HE closed the door and nodded genially to Ned and Martha. He waved them to chairs, and seated himself behind the desk. “And now, my children, we can have our little talk!” He rubbed his hands pleurably. “You see, David,” he went on, addressing Ned Gregg, “your sister is in a very bad spot. Now that we three are alone, I can be quite frank with you. Your sister will never leave this asylum alive!”

Ned’s baby-face showed only amazement. “What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that Attorney Brant and I intend to gain control of the entire estate.”

“Maybe the police would like to hear that,” said Ned.

Shoemaker nodded genially, and motioned toward the phone. “There it is. Make your call. But—what will you tell them?”

“I’ll tell them that you’re planning kill my sister. I’ll tell them that you’re a crook.”

“Ah! And of course you’ll be able to prove everything you tell them?”

“Sure. Martha heard you with her own ears. She heard you cooking the whole thing up with Brant.”

Shoemaker shook his head, looking like an indulgent uncle who is trying to correct an erring nephew. “You must realize, my dear David, that Martha has been adjudged insane, after examination by competent alienists. Her testimony would not be accepted in court.” He stopped for a moment to let that sink in, then: “You see, my dear children, you are in what is commonly called a spot. You have no other choice but to accept my terms.”

“And what are your terms?”

“Ah! That is better. I am glad to see that you are a reasonable young man. Now I’ll tell you what I want. You and your sister control an estate worth two million dollars. I am not a hog. I am willing to leave you a share of it. You and Martha will execute contracts to buy more of Attorney Brant’s land in Idaho—altogether, one million eight hundred thousand dollars’ worth. That will leave you two hundred thousand dollars between you—enough for two youngsters like you.”

“And if we don’t?” Ned asked slowly.

“Then, my dear David, a very unpleasant thing will happen. Our friends downstairs—Cesar Borgia, Napoleon, Hanoverius and others will discover that you and your sister are planning to overthrow them and seize their empires. You can well imagine what will ensue. I would regret to see you and your beautiful sister set upon by those vicious madmen. You will die—not very pleasantly. And then, Attorney Brant, being the executor of the estate, will have full control. He will sign the contracts for the land purchase. It would be much simpler, however, if you would both agree to sign, for

it would save us the necessity of a double murder.”

“What would you have done if I hadn’t shown up?” Ned asked. “You couldn’t have gotten my half of the estate.”

“Oh, but I made sure you’d show up, my dear David. Brant and I deliberately let Martha overhear our plans, so she’d send for you in a panic. We planned for her to bribe Oscar Hamm and Mrs. Titus. We didn’t expect, of course, that you would become so violent. We had never met you before, but we had heard that you were rather young and inexperienced. You see, David, there is nothing for you to do but sign.”

“Oh, yes there is,” Ned said softly. He got up and started toward Shoemaker.

**T**HE doctor smiled in a bored way. “I am not a man of violence, David. But I have provided for violence.” He pushed a button on his desk. Immediately, the door behind him opened, and a man appeared. The man was immaculately dressed in a tuxedo. He had a square face, and cunning eyes. In his hand there was a revolver. He pointed it across the desk, at Martha Snow.

“If anybody moves,” the man said, “I’ll shoot Martha first.”

Ned Gregg stopped short, two feet from the desk.

Doctor Shoemaker’s smile never left his face. “Permit me to introduce my associate, Attorney Lester Brant. Lester, this is young David Snow.”

Brant came into the room, holding the revolver pointed at Martha. “I heard the conversation through the door,” he said. “It seems they understand the situation well enough. Let’s get it over with. Do they sign, or don’t they?”

At the same time, the other door of the office opened, and the male nurse appeared there, also with a gun. Ned Gregg and Martha Snow were now covered from both directions.

Ned looked at Martha. Her eyes were wide, despairing. He turned to Shoemaker. “What about my friend outside—Captain Lambert? You didn’t figure on him.”

Shoemaker shrugged. “The taxi driver is in my employ. He is an old-time waterfront thug. He will know how to handle your friend. I’m sure he won’t make any trouble.”

Just then, a long, low whistle sounded from somewhere outside. It was repeated twice.

Ned smiled faintly. That was Mike Schultz’s signal that all was well. There had been some handling down there—but not the way Shoemaker thought.

“All right,” Ned said suddenly. “Martha, it looks like they’ve got us. I guess we’ll have to sign.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Shoemaker. “You may be young, but you are very wise. You realized that it is better to be alive, with two hundred thousand dollars, than dead, with two million!”

Attorney Lester Brant only grunted, keeping his gun fixed on Martha. The male nurse stood immobile, with his weapon pointed at Ned.

Shoemaker motioned to Brant, who extracted a sheaf of papers from his pocket and handed them to the doctor.

“There will only be a few papers to sign,” Shoemaker said. “We have made the transaction as simple as possible, so that it cannot be questioned—later.”

While he was talking, Ned exchanged a glance with Martha. He knew what she was thinking. These vultures would not be foolish enough to leave them alive after they had signed. Also, if they discovered that Ned was not really Martha’s brother, they would blow up.

“Sign here,” said Shoemaker, turning the papers around on the desk, and offering Ned a pen. “And please do not attempt to change your signature. Attorney Brant has never met you before, but he has seen your signature

many times.”

Ned’s eyes flickered. He took the pen, bent over the desk, and signed: Ned Gregg.

He pushed the paperback to Shoemaker, and stood up, with the pen still in his hand.

Shoemaker glanced down at it, saw the signature, and his jaw fell open.

Ned deftly jerked the fountain pen, sending a stream of ink into the doctor’s open mouth. With almost the same motion, he flipped the pen across at Attorney Brant.

Brant involuntarily twisted out of the way, and in that moment, Ned jumped him.

Ned didn’t waste time trying to get the gun away from him. He just smashed a right and a left to Brant’s face, crashing him backward against the wall.

Shoemaker was mouthing inky curses and spitting black liquid. The male nurse at the door grinned sourly, and started to take a step forward, aiming his revolver carefully at Ned Gregg’s head, with his finger curled around the trigger.

But just then the door behind the male nurse opened, and Mike Schultz came in like a tornado. He hit the nurse hard between the shoulder blades, and the fellow went stumbling forward into the desk.

Ned Gregg, timing himself with remarkable precision, swung around and brought up a right to meet the male nurse’s advancing jaw. There was an ominous *crack*, and the man stopped short in his tracks, straightened up, then collapsed.

“Nice teamwork, Mike,” Ned said approvingly. “I see you handled that cab driver okay.”

“He was a cinch,” Mike said. “He could slug, but he left himself wide open. And besides, he has a glass jaw.”

“What about the car that followed us? Were Hamm and Mrs. Titus in it?”

“Yep. I took care of the cab driver first, and then I sort of made a reception committee for Hamm and Titus. Oscar’s nose is in bad shape, and Mrs. Titus didn’t

like the way I handled her gun. So they were kind enough to let me put bracelets on them. They’re out in the hall now—handcuffed to a radiator.”

“Nice work, Mike,” said Ned. “Bring them in.”

He winked at Martha. “Take it easy, Baby,” he said. “We’ll have you sane again in no time!”

Shoemaker was sitting at his desk, blubbering and spitting ink. He started to get up, but Ned put a hand against his face and pushed him back down into the chair. “You take it easy, too, doc. I’m running the show now!”

**M**IKE SCHULTZ came in, grinning, shoving Oscar Hamm and Mrs. Titus along ahead of him. Hamm’s left hand was cuffed to Mrs. Titus’s left. The woman was scowling, but Hamm’s facial expression was not so easy to discern, because of the great blob of red which spread out from his flattened nose.

From downstairs there came a great clamor, the sound of continuous, maniacal shouting, and the declamatory voices of the madmen. The inmates down there had sensed that something was happening, and they were kicking and beating against the door of their sitting room.

Mike winked. “I locked that door from the outside, so we wouldn’t be disturbed for a while.”

Ned Gregg nodded. He turned a stern glance on Oscar Hamm and Mrs. Titus.

“You two,” he said sternly, “have been aiding and abetting Doctor Shoemaker here, in his criminal activities. Are you ready to take your medicine?”

Oscar Hamm’s thick lips twisted in hate. “You ain’t got a thing on us. An’ when I get outta this, I’m gonna give you back plenty for this busted nose. That was a lucky punch you landed, but next time it’s gonna be different!”

"You can have your chance right now!" Ned said. He motioned to Mike Schultz.

Mike grinned, and unlocked the handcuffs from Hamm's wrist.

Oscar Hamm looked down at his free hands, and a slow smile spread across his thick features. He looked at Ned. "I'm gonna kill you!"

"That's right!" Doctor Shoemaker yelled. "Kill him. Kill him!"

Oscar Hamm leaped at Ned.

Ned didn't move from the spot where he stood. He took the full force of Hamm's charge, standing like the Rock of Gibraltar. His left flicked away Hamm's flailing attack, and then he drove a right into the asylum guard's solar plexus. Only that single blow, but it was enough.

Hamm's breath went out in a great *whoosh*, and he doubled over in agony.

"Okay," said Ned. "Any time you want more, just say so."

Hamm couldn't utter a word. He was licked by that one punch. His face was gray with pain, his forehead flecked with sweat.

"And now," Ned said to Mike Schultz, "you can take Oscar downstairs. Put him in the room with Cesar Borgia and Napoleon and Alexander and Hanoverius, and all the rest. Tell those nuts that Hamm is Adolf Hitler, and that he's going to send them all to concentration camps and take their crowns away from them!"

"No!" Hamm gasped, getting a little of his breath back. "Don't do that! They'll tear me apart!"

"Exactly!" Ned said genially. "That's the general idea. You were willing to put Martha Snow in this dump. You didn't have any mercy on her. Why should we spare you?"

"You can't do that!" Hamm squawked. "It—it would be *murder!*"

"All right," Ned said implacably. "Come clean then. Give us the inside dope on Shoemaker, here, and we'll give you a break."

"I'll do it!" Hamm screamed. "I'll do it. I know plenty about Shoemaker. He and Brant cooked up the whole thing about Miss Snow. It was a plot to get her estate—"

Oscar Hamm stopped talking suddenly, his eyes widening as he looked at the desk behind which Shoemaker was standing. The doctor was snarling with anger. He had snatched open a drawer and picked up a small revolver. He aimed it at Oscar Hamm.

"You rat!" he barked, and started to pull the trigger.

NED GREGG had been ready for that. He had his own gun in his hand before Shoemaker had finished speaking, and he fired just a split second sooner.

The shot thundered in the room, and the bullet made a clean, neat round hole right in the center of Doctor Shoemaker's forehead. And at exactly the same instant, a second round, neat little hole appeared on the right side of the doctor's forehead, a little off center from Ned's shot.

Ned glanced at Mike Schultz, who was holding Mrs. Titus's small pistol. The explosion of Ned's heavier weapon had drowned the bark of Mike's shot.

Mike looked glum. "I certainly can't learn to hit a bull's eye the way you can, Boss!" he said disgustedly.

Doctor Jason Shoemaker sat down in his chair. The two holes in his forehead made him look unbalanced, for one was larger than the other. But Doctor Jason Shoemaker didn't care about that. He was no longer interested in appearances, for he was quite dead. He slumped over on the desk, then gently slid down to the floor alongside of Attorney Brant. He moved no more.

Ned Gregg turned to Oscar Hamm and Mrs. Titus. "You two can get off with a fairly light sentence by talking when the cops get here—"

"Don't worry," said Mrs. Titus. "We'll talk plenty. We aren't working for Doctor

Shoemaker any more. A dead man can't pay you any salary!"

An hour later, when Ned had turned over his prisoners and their signed confessions to the police, he and Martha and Mike Schultz got into a taxicab.

There was a new, vivacious light in Martha Snow's eyes. "Where are we going?" she asked.

Ned grinned. "To a night club. We're going to celebrate your return to sanity."

"To think," she said dreamily, "an hour ago I was on my way to an insane asylum—and death" And now—" Her lower lip trembled just a little. "And my brother David doesn't even know what's been going on. It's lucky I called you—instead of David."

"Lady," said Mike, "you don't know how close we were to not going. We thought the whole thing was screwy."

Ned chuckled. "Mike thought your call was a phony. He thought we wouldn't get the five grand you promised."

"Five thousand!" she exclaimed. "After you've saved two millions dollars for David and myself? You think I'm a piker? I'd be ashamed to look myself in the mirror if I was so cheap. I'm going to pay you more—much more!"

Impulsively, she put a hand on Ned's knee. "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to give you a blank check, and let you write your own fee!"

Mike Schultz sighed. "She's nuts again!"

Martha Snow smiled sweetly. "And there's one thing more I'm going to do. Remember when you gave me that bear hug in Balbo's, Ned Gregg? Remember what I promised? A good kick in the shins—"

Ned grinned. "That's right—Sis!"

He put his arms around her and hugged tight.

Martha Snow forgot all about that promised kick in the shins.